

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

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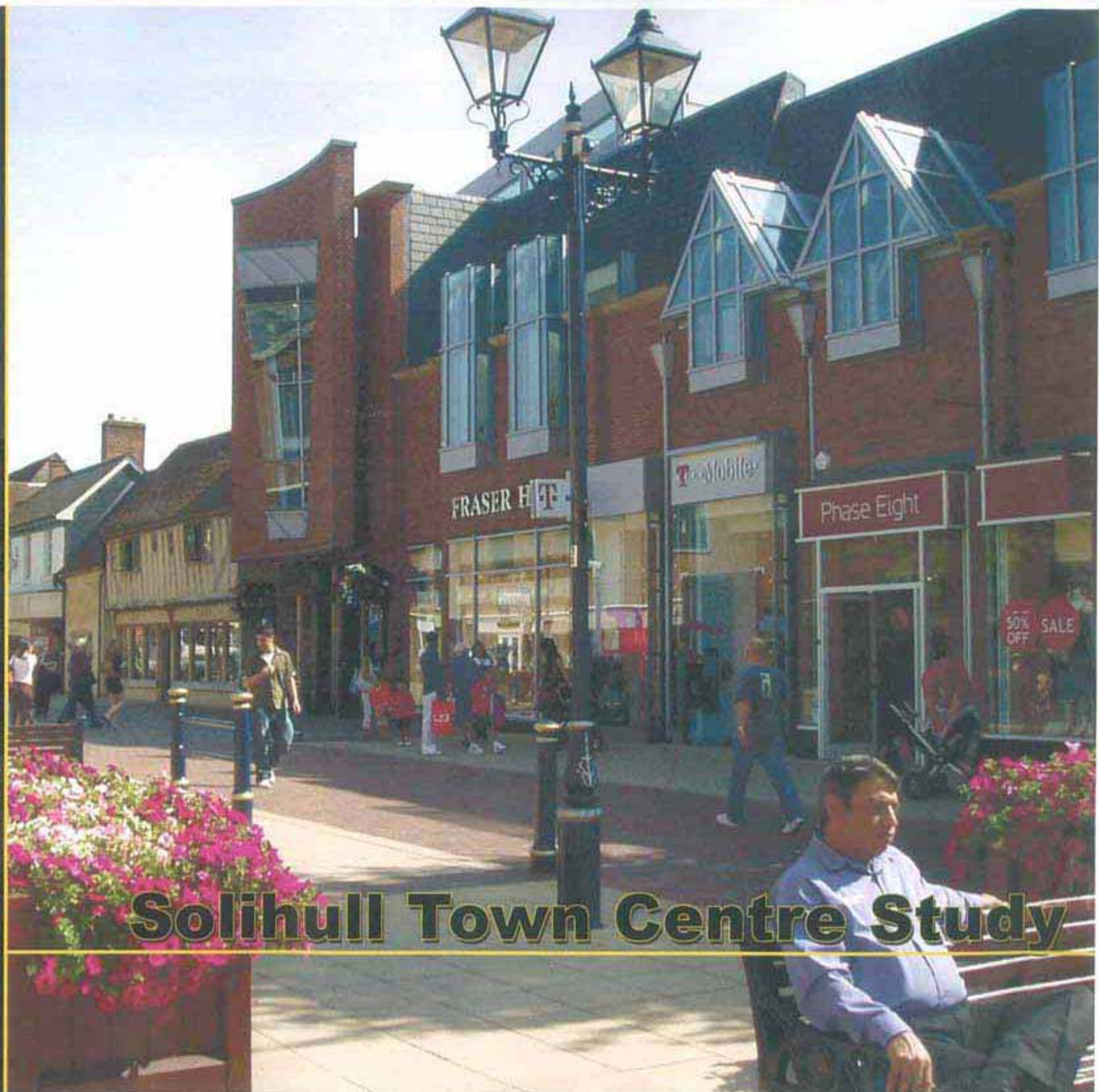
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Solihull Town Centre Study

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This Study sets out options for the future development of Solihull Town Centre. It does not represent Council policy but aims to prompt and inform debate of what direction policy might take in the preparation of the Local Development Framework for the Borough.

It needs to be recognised that the Study was completed in economic circumstances very different to those of today. This will challenge both the scale and pace of growth that was considered possible. However its analyses of opportunities, capacity, choices and sequencing of development remain valid.

The current economic climate also acts to highlight the over-riding need to sustain existing investment in the town centre. This will remain a key plank of Council policy and it will be essential to ensure that the town centre's quality and distinction is not put at risk

Contents

Part		Page no.		
	Executive Summary	1		
1	Introduction	9		
	1.1 Consultants Brief and Study Objectives		6	
	1.2 Principal Components of the Study			
	1.3 Study Process			
	1.4 Structure of the report			
2	Where are we today?	10		
	2.1 Solihull Town Centre - Context			
	2.2 The Study Area			
	2.3 The Direction Papers		7	
	2.4 Development and Property Market			
	2.5 Retail Policy			
	2.6 Town Centre Healthcheck			
	2.7 Public Sector Assets			
	2.8 Transport and Movement			
	2.9 Urban Design			
	2.10 Conclusions from Direction Papers		8	
	2.11 Policy Context			
3	Where would we like to be?	21		
	3.1 Introduction			
	3.2 A Vision Statement for Solihull Town Centre			
	3.3 Strategic Objectives			
	3.4 How will this be achieved?			
	3.5 What factors will be key to the success of this Vision?			
4	How do we get there?	24		
	4.1 Introduction			
	4.2 Sustainable Development			
	4.3 Developing the Vision - Solihull Town Centre			
	4.4 Town Centre Opportunity Sites			
5	The Spatial Strategy	29		
	5.1 Design Process and Objectives			
	5.2 Urban Design Objectives			
	5.3 Urban Form			
	5.4 Land Use			
	5.5 Links and Connections			
	5.6 Public Realm and Townscape			
	5.7 Movement and Transport Strategy			
	5.8 The Illustrative Masterplan			
	Delivering the Strategy – Phasing			38
	6.1 Phasing			
	6.2 Phase 1 (5yr-blocks)			
	6.3 Phase 2 (5yr-blocks)			
	6.4 Phase 3 (5yr-blocks)			
	6.5 Phase 4 (5yr-blocks)			
	Delivering the Strategy – The Planning Policy Framework			47
	7.1 Process – General Considerations			
	7.2 The Requirements of PPS12			
	7.3 The Requirements of PPS6			
	7.4 The Scope and Status of the Solihull Town Centre Strategy			
	7.5 The Timing of the Review of the Regional Spatial Strategy			
	7.6 Recommendations			
	Delivering of the Strategy – Implementation Plan			51
	8.1 Introduction			
	8.2 Implementation Plan			
	8.3 Monitoring and Evaluation Framework			
	8.4 Summary of Report Recommendations			
	Appendices			
	1 – Direction Papers (bound separately)			
	2 – Planning Policy Context			
	3 – Sustainability Appraisals Methodology and Core Sustainability Aims			

Contents

List of Figures

- Figure 1.1: Study Methodology
- Figure 2.1: Solihull within the strategic context of the West Midlands
- Figure 2.2: Solihull Town Centre Boundaries
- Figure 2.3: Town Centre Land Uses
- Figure 2.4: Landscape and Open Spaces
- Figure 2.5: Town Centre Character Areas
- Figure 2.6: Positive Town Centre Features
- Figure 2.7: Negative Town Centre Features
- Figure 4.1: Key Opportunity Sites
- Figure 5.1 : Urban Form
- Figure 5.2: Land Use – Ground Floor
- Figure 5.3: Land Use – Upper Floor
- Figure 5.4: Links and Movement
- Figure 5.5: Townscape
- Figure 5.6: Overarching Spatial Strategy Diagram
- Figure 6.1: Phasing Strategy
- Figure 6.2: Phase 1
- Figure 6.3: Phase 2
- Figure 6.4: Phase 3
- Figure 6.5: Phase 4

List of Tables

- Table E1: Site Evaluation and Phasing Strategy
- Table E2: Development Plan Documents
- Table 2.1: Solihull SWOT Analysis (May 2006)
- Table 2.2: Forecast Gains in Office Employment (2001 to 2021)
- Table 2.3: Recommendations for Office needs across the network of Strategic Centres
- Table 4.1: Evaluation of Strategic Options
- Table 4.2: Site Evaluation and Phasing Summary
- Table 5.1: Summary of Future Car Parking Requirements for Solihull Town Centre
- Table 6.1: Summary of Phase 1 Development (5yr-blocks)
- Table 6.2: Summary of Phase 2 Development (5yr-blocks)
- Table 6.3: Summary of Phase 3 Development (5yr-blocks) Touchwood Expansion A
- Table 6.4: Summary of Phase 3 Development (5yr-blocks) Touchwood Expansion B
- Table 6.5: Summary of Phase 3 Development (5yr-blocks) Touchwood Expansion A & B
- Table 6.6: Summary of Phase 4 Development (5yr-blocks)
- Table 7.1: Development Plan Documents
- Table 8.1: Risk Management

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Part One - Introduction

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) is committed to maintaining and enhancing the quality of Solihull Town Centre in order that it retains its competitive position within the West Midlands Region. The town centre has a multi-functional role serving the whole of the Borough. Its relatively high level of accessibility for all modes of travel, including public transport, means that it has a vital part to play in meeting the needs of the whole community and in contributing to the delivery of a long-term sustainable pattern of development in the Borough.

This Study has been prepared to inform the development of a Town Centre Strategy for Solihull up to 2021 and to identify the levels of growth that are deliverable from a capacity and market perspective. The Study and its technical appendices will inform and provide part of the evidence base for the preparation of the proposed Solihull Local Development Framework Core Strategy and a Town Centre Area Action Plan/Centres Development Plan Document (DPD).

It sets out a robust vision and possible strategy for the future development of the Town Centre. It takes on board the views of key town centre stakeholders and the Council. It provides a basis for further change – it is a vision that is long-term and challenging, but when achieved will ensure that Solihull town Centre remains **a place of quality and distinction**.

Part Two – Where are we today?

The Town Centre Study is the culmination of an evaluation of Solihull Town Centre carried out by property consultants, GVA Grimley, with the assistance of Tibbalds Planning and Urban Design, and transportation consultants, Mott MacDonalds. This work has fallen into 3 parts, namely:

- (i) Baseline research (including the preparation of Six Direction Papers) which considered property, centre performance, economic, urban design and transportation issues;

- (ii) Preparation of a vision and key strategic principles which provide the basis for the development of a recommended strategy to guide the future development of the town centre; and

- (iii) Drawing up a possible Town Centre Strategy to inform the Area Action Plan (AAP) process for Solihull Town Centre.

The Town Centre Study boundary is wider than that set out in the adopted Solihull Unitary Development Plan recognising the need to consider the future development and integration of adjoining transitional areas more effectively with the town centre core. The document sets out a clear purpose and aims centred upon, amongst other things, creating a clear vision, identifying deliverable objectives, providing a basis for future development and investment and crucially, sets a framework for delivery of an integrated set of transportation proposals and other improvements.

Research undertaken as part of this study indicates that Solihull remains a vital and viable centre that has benefited from recent improvements, most notably the opening of Touchwood. Despite this the centre lacks a sufficient diversity of uses to support further investment, notably in town centre development. The redevelopment and reconfiguration of Mell Square will provide a major catalyst for securing the further physical and environmental improvements within the town centre. It will also, together with the potential for extending Touchwood, serve to maintain and enhance the quality of Solihull's retail offer. Importantly, it is concluded that Solihull would benefit significantly from a long-term framework which plans retail growth to 2021, linked to complementary transport interventions.

Whilst retail activity is the principal impetus for growth in the town centre there are, in addition, other types of uses, including offices, leisure and residential which could support new retail development to create high quality mixed use schemes.

A number of historic and physical characteristics will influence emerging town centre development proposals. Analysis of these characteristics has enabled the identification of seven character areas notably the High Street, Mell Square, Touchwood, Civic Quarter, Office Quarter, edge-of-centre areas (e.g.

Monkspath Hall Road and the existing railway station area) and Warwick Road.

A strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis has been prepared which serves to highlight the strengths the centre must build upon, whilst recognising and tackling weaknesses and emerging threats through the adoption of appropriate responses and action. Drivers of change in the centre have also been identified, along with a range of issues to be addressed through the preparation of a Town Centre Area Action Plan. If these matters are not tackled then the competitive edge of the town centre and the quality of its shopping environment will decline over time both absolutely and in comparison with centres elsewhere in the region. The need for change is heavily influenced by the following factors:

- Strategic policy considerations (including the relative positioning and role of Solihull in the regional retail hierarchy) and the current review of RSS;
- Growing market demand for commercial and residential development;
- The need to maintain accessibility of the town centre by all transport modes;
- Growing congestion which creates pressure for improved modal shift and measures to encourage this (including addressing car-parking issues);
- Competition and maintaining investment value;
- Public sector estate strategies which are critical to land assembly;
- Deteriorating environmental quality due to traffic congestion;
- Diversification and character of centre; and
- Availability of a number of development opportunities means that a comprehensive strategy is required to guide their delivery.

An analysis of national, regional and local planning policy framework confirms that the Study and its associated proposals accord wholly with

Executive Summary

extant planning policy and will provide a robust basis for the preparation of the proposed Area Action Plan for the town centre.

In this regard the study seeks to address the conclusions of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy - Regional Centres Study (Roger Tym & Partners, March 2006) on the potential need for further retail and office development in Solihull. The report identifies a potential retail capacity requirement for an additional 25,000 to 33,000 sq. m net sales area in Solihull over the period to 2021. Translating these net sales figures into gross (at a net/gross ratio of 70%) implies capacity for an additional 36,000 to 47,000 sq. m gross additional comparison floorspace. The analysis also identifies a potential requirement for an additional 100,000 sq. m of new office floorspace within the town centre over the same period to 2021. This Study looks at the opportunities available to accommodate the levels of growth and the key implications of these proposals for the character quality and accessibility of the town centre.

Part Three – Where we would like to be?

The importance of Solihull Town Centre as a focus for continuing economic, social and community activity within the Borough of Solihull cannot be overestimated. Its buildings and public spaces provide it with a unique identity and sense of place.

The present focus upon the need to accommodate significant new growth within the West Midlands Major Urban Areas (including the Birmingham/Solihull Growth Point Area) underlines the unique opportunity that now exists to attract further new interest and investment in Solihull Town Centre. This Study crystallises a vision to direct and co-ordinate proposals to create a competitive and vibrant place implemented through a sound framework for action.

The Vision Statement in the Study sets out a clear framework of ambition reflecting fully the need to ensure that Solihull remains as a thriving, high quality and distinctive town. The means of achieving this vision are also outlined. Of particular importance will be the need for:

- continuing community support;

- long-term political commitment to achievement of a common vision;
- the close alignment of the Council's estates and service strategies with its land use and transport policies for the future development of the town centre; and
- the continuing ability to generate substantial private sector investment supported by complementary public sector interventions.

The next section of the Study identifies in spatial terms how the town centre of the future could be structured to deliver the vision and meet an associated set of strategic objectives. The key structuring elements (which are described in more detail in Part Five) can be summarised as follows:

- **Consolidation of existing retail core** by the improvement of Mell Square;
- **Extension of the High Street axis** through new development along Station Road;
- **Further expansion of retail, leisure, cultural and civic** uses to the south of Touchwood and east of Mell Square;
- **Reinforcing the western edge of the town centre** by the redevelopment of sites on Lode Lane and Station Road for mixed use, predominantly residential development;
- **Consolidation of the office quarter** by incorporating new development with positive frontages onto Princes Way as well as Homer Road;
- **Improving public transport** through the creation of a bus mall on Poplar Road and investigating the potential for the development of a new bus/rail interchange in Monkspath Hall Road;
- **Creating new residential quarters** for medium density housing within easy walking distance of the town centre;
- **Ring road enhancement** by reinforcing and creating tree lined boulevards and active frontages;

- **Environmental enhancement** of other key roads;
- **Better car parking and improved access** to the town centre; and
- **Providing a connected network** of streets, paths and spaces.

The factors critical to the success of the vision have been drawn out. Foremost amongst these is the need to recognise that Solihull's future growth is constrained by the capacity of the transport networks which serve it. Therefore, development must be phased and linked to the development of an integrated transport strategy. This would promote and prioritise the use of sustainable transport modes as a preferred means of accessing the town centre in the future, whilst recognising the need to maintain the commercial attractiveness of the centre.

Part Four – How do we get there?

Part Four of the Study examines how a strategy for the future development of the town centre could be developed. In order to drive this process a set of Core Principles has been developed to underpin the sustainable development vision at the heart of this Study.

Delivering the Vision – Solihull Town Centre

In order to deliver the Vision for Solihull Town Centre described in Part Three of the report; the Study considers three alternative strategic scenarios for achieving the Council's aims and objectives. These are summarised below:

Consolidation

This strategic approach to planning for the town centre represents a "do minimum" scenario. Under this option it is assumed that only limited further growth is promoted in Solihull with the objective of minimising the impact of further development on the town centre's transport infrastructure and environment. In terms of development, a limited refurbishment of Mell Square would be expected to proceed with small-scale retail, leisure and residential "in-fill" developments coming forward on a piece-meal and opportunistic basis.

Executive Summary

In the short-term the adoption of this approach is unlikely to have any discernible impact on the overall viability and vitality of the town centre. However, in the medium term to long-term declining levels of investment due to a lack of development opportunities and increasing levels of traffic congestion could mean that the competitiveness of the town centre would begin to steadily erode relative to other centres that have become a focus for greater investment and development.

Market Led Growth

Under this scenario it is assumed that the Council could allow the market to largely determine the future scale and nature of new development within the town centre. This approach would seek to capitalise on the strength of the centre as a retail destination and as a focus for commercial office activity.

Although the adoption of this approach might initially find support from developers, the pursuit of such a strategy is ultimately likely to become “self consuming” as the promotion of unrestricted levels of growth rapidly becomes unsustainable, with the town’s character and environment adversely affected by inappropriate development and congestion.

Managed Growth

Under the managed growth scenario, future levels of growth could be closely tied to the physical capacity of the town centre and supporting transport infrastructure to accommodate further development.

Consistent with this approach the overall scale, mix and phasing of new development could be determined having regard to a number of factors. These include the need to ensure that the scale and nature of new development is consistent with the principle of maintaining Solihull’s role and function as part of a balanced network of centres within the West Midlands. Regard will also need to be had to the transport and environmental capacity of the town centre to support further development and the need to promote sustainable transport choices through better public transport access and the adoption of a centre wide car park management regime. Crucial to the long-term health of the town centre will be the need to maintain and enhance investment values and limit disruption through the phasing of development to

ensure targeted and high quality reinvestment in the physical and economic fabric of the town centre.

The relative merits of each of the scenarios described above were subsequently evaluated against a set of strategic criteria including market demand, planning policy and sustainability considerations. Key town centre stakeholders were also consulted. Based on this assessment the ‘Managed Growth’ scenario performed best in relation to the potential to achieve and satisfy the strategic objectives agreed for Solihull Town Centre.

Evaluation of Development Opportunities

The study identifies a number a specific development opportunities for consolidating and widening the range of uses in the town centre. These have been evaluated, in terms of their capacity, availability and suitability in meeting the floorspace projections set out in the West Midlands Regional Centres Study (WMRCS). The results of this analysis are set out in Table 1 below.

Table E1: Site Evaluation and Phasing Summary

Site and Phasing	Potential Scale of Retail/Leisure Development	Potential Availability	Overall Development Potential
Mell Square (Phase 1)	Large scale	Short term	Good
Lode Lane (Phase 2)	Small scale	Short term	Reasonable
Triangle Site (Phase 2)	Small scale	Short term	Reasonable
Magistrates Court/Police Station (Phase 3A)	Large scale	Medium term	Reasonable
The Council House (Phase 3B)	Large scale	Medium term	Reasonable
Monkspath Car Parks – Residential/offices (Phase 3/4)	Not applicable	Long term	Reasonable
Station Quarter Site (Phase 4)	Not applicable	Long term	Reasonable
Morrisons (Phase 4)	Medium scale	Long term	Poor

Based on this assessment there are a number of strategic development opportunities that have good or reasonable development potential for retail and mixed uses that could be implemented in the short to medium term (i.e. by 2016).

The key development opportunities identified include the redevelopment and reconfiguration of Mell Square and the further expansion of Touchwood. However, the latter would require the relocation of existing uses including the Police Station, the Magistrates Court and the Council House. In quantitative and qualitative terms these two development opportunities provide sufficient physical capacity to accommodate the levels of growth identified for Solihull in the WMRCS.

Part Five – The Spatial Strategy

The Spatial Strategy sets out the principal development requirements for the successful implementation of the Vision. It has been conceived in two inter-related ways that integrate with and, are supported by, the accompanying movement, transport and parking strategy.

First, it is expressed as a set of topic related layers that identify, for the future town centre as a whole, the key strategic components of urban form, land uses and activities, links and connections, townscape and urban design elements.

Secondly, it is expressed as a series of phased development projects (referenced in Part 6), specifically conceived so that each phase brings about significant improvements to the centre in its own right, and either unlocks or does not compromise the development opportunities identified in subsequent phases.

An illustrative masterplan has been prepared to demonstrate how the built form of the future town centre could be physically configured, with an enhanced public realm of street, routes and public spaces that provide and reinforce permeability, legibility and ease of pedestrian movement to, and within, the centre.

Movement and Transport Strategy

This section of the report identifies the key transport issues that need to be addressed as part of the development of an integrated transport strategy to underpin the implementation of the “Managed Growth” Option and to underpin the delivery of the Spatial Strategy. The key issues to be addressed include, worsening peak period congestion; the poor relative

Executive Summary

public transport accessibility of the town centre and a lack of safe, convenient and attractive pedestrian routes into the town centre, especially from the railway station.

To tackle these issues, the study identifies a range of key strategic interventions which should be considered as part of a co-ordinated strategy to improve the attractiveness of non-car modes of transport as the preferred means of getting to the town centre. These include:

- Improving modal split to reduce the increasing congestion on the roads surrounding Solihull by encouraging greater use of public transport and non-motorised modes of transport;
- The need for a comprehensive parking strategy designed to deter long stay commuter parking and address issues of capacity and future supply;
- Investigating the scope for introducing an element of bus based park and ride measures to encourage those who work in the town centre to use public transport;
- The development of a new bus mall on Poplar Road which could be complemented at a later date by the provision of a new bus and rail interchange on the Monkspath Hall road carparks.
- Improved pedestrian and cycle connections; and
- The development of a bespoke Solihull Centre Transport Model to assist in identifying the need for further junction capacity improvements to support the future phased development of the town centre.

The report identifies a number of funding sources and delivery mechanisms that might be appropriate for delivering the above transport interventions. These include the capture and use of developer contributions under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act, the submission of a Town Centre Transport Package bid through the West Midlands Local Transport Plan (LTP) funding process. In the future, additional funding opportunities may arise through the operation of the recently established Transport Innovation Fund (TIF) process.

Part Six – Delivery of the Spatial Strategy - Phasing

The future development of Solihull town centre as envisaged in this Study could be implemented in four phases. These are presented in 5 year blocks though clearly more detailed programming will be required as the next stage in taking this study forward. However, this section describes the sequence of development that could occur and how each component part could be secured. Some of the elements in the later phases are interdependent on the delivery of the earlier phases and some are not.

Many of the built development proposals will require the provision of new transport infrastructure. This section outlines when and how the infrastructure will be delivered. The strategy indicates where land assembly will be required, and the planning obligations that the Council should seek to support any proposed development. It should be noted that the planning obligations identified in the strategy are a likely minimum requirement of development and subject to development viability testing, Solihull MBC may wish to seek further developer contributions in relation to emerging planning proposals.

The Phasing Strategy has been developed having regard to the following important considerations:

- The need to ensure that the allocation and development of sites for retail, leisure and office development is phased so as to come forward broadly in line with regional and local assessments of capacity and need;
- The wish to avoid an over-supply of floorspace relative to market demand in order to maintain market and investment values;
- The timescales associated with the forward planning and provision of strategic public transport infrastructure to support development proposals;
- Statutory processes and the timescales for their completion (LDDs, LTP and land assembly etc);
- The complexity and nature of known development constraints and pre-conditions; and

- Differing organisational priorities and decision-making timescales.

Phase 1 (5 year block)

Built Development

The key development proposed under Phase 1 of the strategy, is the redevelopment and reconfiguration of Mell Square. Significant opportunities exist to remodel the shopping centre to provide improved accommodation and an enhanced range of retail and supporting A3, A4 and A5 uses together with new residential apartments above ground or at first floor level. The redevelopment of Mell Square should be undertaken in such a manner so as not to prejudice any future redevelopment of the adjoining Morrisons site and the creation of attractive pedestrian links between the two sites. Redeveloping and extending Mell Square could deliver the following outputs.

Retail (Including A3, A4 & A5)	10,000m ² (gross)
Residential	240 units
Replacement of existing decked car parks	

Planning Obligations

Through the development of this area the Council would seek to secure by way of Section 106 and Section 278 Agreements:

- Affordable housing;
- Private sector contributions towards educational, health and open space requirements as appropriate;
- Public realm enhancements;
- New bus mall on Poplar Road;
- Implementation of Bus Showcase improvements;
- Traffic management changes;
- Cycle parking facilities;
- Improved pedestrian access to Rail/Bus Station via Lode Lane;
- Poplar Road car park access closed and moved to Warwick Road; and
- Possible cultural/community hall facilities.

Executive Summary

Phase 2 (5 year block)

Built Development

Two developments comprise Phase 2. The opportunity exists to extend the urban character of the High Street westward along Lode Lane to create an improved western gateway to the town centre. The redevelopment of the Dominion Court car park and surrounding area provides the potential for a high density mixed-use development with retail and offices at ground floor and residential (apartments in 4 storey blocks) above. This could yield the following amount of development:

Commercial (retail/office)	2,500m ² (gross)
Residential	165 units
Car parking at basement level	

A further opportunity exists along Station Road / Lode Lane to promote the redevelopment of existing land uses (including Lode Lane car park) to deliver a high quality mixed use development incorporating retail, restaurant and offices at ground floor and residential uses (apartments in 3/6 storey blocks) above. This could provide the following:

Commercial (retail/restaurant/office)	2,600m ² (gross)
Residential	285 units
Car parking at basement level	

Planning Obligations

Though the development of these areas the Council would seek to secure through Section 106 and 278 Agreements:

- Affordable Housing;
- Private sector contributions towards educational, health and open space requirements, as appropriate;
- Public realm enhancements;

- Private sector contributions towards the VMS signing and parking management initiatives;
- Implementation of Bus Showcase initiatives; and
- Minor junction upgrades.

Phase 3 (5 year block)

Built Development

Following the completion of the Mell Square redevelopment, the future expansion of Touchwood represents in planning and market terms the most appropriate location for accommodating additional large scale retail comparison goods floor space in the town centre.

Subject to market demand and capacity considerations, it is anticipated that development could proceed in two tranches, notated 3A and 3B.

Phase 3A (5 year block)

Scope exists to take advantage of any future relocation of Solihull Police Station and Magistrates Court to provide additional retail and office floorspace, with a strong frontage to Homer Road. The amount of commercial floor space achievable on the site will be dependent on whether the Council decides to retain or redevelop the existing library and theatre complex. For the purposes of this strategy we have assumed that the site remains in Civic, cultural and community use, either in its current form or following redevelopment, to provide new and enhanced cultural and community facilities.

The approximate levels of floorspace that could be achieved during Phase 3A are:

Retail	16,000m ² (gross)
Office	8,000m ² (gross)
Civic/Cultural/Community	10,000m ² (gross)
Car parking at ground floor/basement	

The implementation of this Phase of development is dependent on the assembly of third party land and the decisions made by the Police and the Magistrates Courts as to the nature of their continued presence in the Solihull town centre and the timing of any future relocation. The timing of the site's redevelopment will also be contingent on any decisions made by the Council in relation to its service delivery and estates strategies and, in particular, the scale and nature of its own property requirements within the town centre. Any delay in arriving at a decision on these matters will have an impact on the timescales for the implementation of Phase 3A and the form of any future development. Assuming early agreement with the Police and Magistrates Court on their relocation, a planning application for the development of the site could be submitted during Phase 2. This would allow for the completion of the scheme during the early part of Phase 3, providing space to accommodate any Council services that would be affected by the implementation of Phase 3B.

The transportation analysis indicates that Phase 3A could be accommodated with relatively small improvements to the existing highway network.

Planning Obligations

Through the development of this area the Council would seek to secure through Section 106 or 278 Agreements:

- The signalisation of Lode Lane /Warwick Road Roundabout;
- Private sector contributions to minor junction upgrades (signal timings etc);
- The implementation of Park and Ride initiatives;
- The implementation of 'Bus Showcase' and 'Red Route' initiatives;
- Provision of cycle parking facilities;
- Private sector contributions to fund public realm enhancements; and
- Enhanced linkages from the town centre to Monkspath Hall Road, in particular the proposed new railway station (see below).

Phase 3B (5 year block)

As part of a second phase of development the opportunity exists to further extend Touchwood through the redevelopment of Solihull Council House and surrounding local authority offices. This would allow for an additional western

Executive Summary

extension of the retail core area and the creation of a new high quality southern gateway and edge to the town centre. The precise configuration of the additional retail floorspace will be developer led and will need to reflect market considerations as they exist at the time of the schemes' development. However, it is clear that the Council will expect the scheme to make provision for the accommodation of a diverse range of retail, leisure, restaurant and civic uses to accommodate and facilitate the Council's role in community leadership. The implementation of Phase 3B, assuming a 2/3 storey development could yield the following amount of floorspace:

Retail (including A3, A4 & A5 uses)	29,000m ² (gross)
Commercial Offices	8,000m ² (gross)
Car parking at ground floor/basement levels	

Depending on market conditions, the development of the southern part of the site for residential uses might be considered as an appropriate alternative use to office development. Adopting this form of development could provide up to 150 apartments.

The majority of the land required for this phase of development is in the ownership of Solihull MBC.

Critical to securing the development of this area for new retail, office and/or residential uses is the need for the Council to relocate from its existing civic buildings to provide a site for development. In order to achieve this the Council is recommended to:

- Undertake an early review of its own service delivery strategies and implications for the future local authority estate;
- Develop an Estates and Property Strategy which identifies the opportunities for delivering replacement civic accommodation within Solihull town centre or elsewhere in the Borough; and
- Consider the scope to procure new Council accommodation through, inter alia, an agreement with a developer to provide replacement civic

accommodation prior to the redevelopment of the existing Council buildings.

There is limited availability of sites within Solihull town centre to accommodate further large scale office development. The current Council offices amount to around 12,000m² (gross) in floorspace. In the context of this study, there are potentially three main options available to the Council if it should resolve to support the Phase 3B redevelopment scheme on the current Council owned estate:

- i) The authority could vacate its offices and find alternative provision elsewhere in the town centre. However, this is seen as unlikely given the absence of available office premises and the costs of relocation to less suitable accommodation.
- ii) The Council could relocate to new purpose built offices built as part of Phase 3A development. This could facilitate more effective redevelopment of the existing Council estate. Part of the capital receipt from the sale of the land would fund the relocation costs.
- iii) A third option could involve the development of Phase 3B providing new (smaller) purpose built offices for the Council to allow relocation of services as a first stage of the scheme. This proposal could, however, prove difficult to manage in terms of the construction and relocation programme.

Of the three options, option (ii) would appear the most deliverable, but will require further detailed valuation (including a masterplan) to assess the appropriate configuration, scale, phasing and costs of potential development. This analysis would inform future discussions with a developer over procurement scenarios.

We have also considered the possible relocation of the Council offices onto the Monkspath Hall Road car parks. However it is likely that large-scale office development on this site in addition to a new public transport interchange would require major junction improvements at Monkspath Hall/Princes Way.

It is likely that any further major expansion to Touchwood (beyond that envisaged under Phase 3A) will need to be accompanied by efforts to achieve a modal shift of 10% towards public transport and non-motorised modes of travel. This will be required to relieve the impacts of increased traffic congestion on the road network generated by further retail development. Although it may be possible to secure the necessary improvements to modal split through the implementation of a range of demand management measures, the Council should give consideration to examining the potential contribution that the development of a new bus/rail interchange on the Monkspath Hall Road carpark can play in meeting this objective.

If a need is identified for the development of a new bus/rail interchange to support the future development of the town centre it should be implemented either prior to or in parallel with the development of Phase 3B.

Although we would expect a significant developer contribution towards the cost of relocating the bus and railway station, the potential exists to promote scheme through the West Midlands Local Transport Plan (LTP) process. In view of the timescales involved in taking forward new proposals through the LTP process, an early decision by the Council supporting the principle of moving the Bus and Railway Stations will be required if it is to proceed in tandem with any further expansion of Touchwood. Further discussions will also be required with Network Rail and Centro to gain their commitment to this priority project.

Planning Obligations

Through the development of the area, the Council would seek to secure through Section 106 and 278 Agreements:

- Private sector contributions to fund the relocation and development of a new Bus/Rail interchange on the Monkspath Hall Road car park. (Only if Phases 3A and 3B are developed);
- Private sector contributions to fund the provision of a direct pedestrian link between the proposed new public transport interchange at

Executive Summary

Monkspath Hall Road and the proposed extensions to Touchwood Court. (Only if Phases 3A and 3B are developed);

- Signalisation of Lode Lane /Warwick Road roundabout;
- Further minor junction upgrades (signal timings etc);
- The implementation of Park and Ride initiatives;
- The implementation of 'Bus Showcase' and 'Red Route' initiatives;
- Private sector contributions to fund public realm enhancements; and
- Private sector contributions towards education, health and public open space needs as appropriate (only if residential development is pursued as an alternative to office development as part of Phase 3B).

Monkspath Hall Road Car Park

Built Development

The redevelopment of part of the Monkspath Hall Road car park to accommodate a new bus and railway station to serve the town centre represents a significant opportunity to improve Solihull's accessibility by public transport. The reconfiguration of the existing surface car parks into decked parking will allow for the development of a new high quality public transport interchange and the introduction of either residential apartments in 2 – 4 storey blocks or a combination of residential and office uses would help provide capital funding and assist in creating a more attractive development. This would allow for the development of the following:

New Bus and Rail public transport interchange	
Residential	375 units
Decked car parking	

The relocation and development of the public transport interchange (and associated car parking) may need to be brought forward in Phase 3 to support the development of Touchwood Phases 3A and 3B. Due to the

phasing of construction activity associated with the public transport interchange and car parking, it is anticipated that residential development on site might not start until the beginning of Phase 4 at the earliest.

Planning Obligations

Through the redevelopment of this site the Council would seek to secure through Section 106 and 278 Agreements:

- Affordable Housing;
- Private sector contributions towards education, health and public open space needs as appropriate; and
- Further minor junction improvements.

Phase 4 (5 year block)

Built Development

Three separate developments comprise Phase 4 of the Strategy.

Station Quarter Site

The potential relocation of the bus and railway stations would release a major development opportunity for residential and/or commercial activity to the north of the town centre. Assuming the relocation of the existing uses to Monkspath Hall Road the opportunity arises to provide the following:

Residential	100 units; or
Commercial Offices/Residential	5,800m ² (gross)/20 Units
Car parking at basement level	

Planning Obligations

Through the redevelopment of this site the Council would seek to secure through Section 106 and 278 Agreements:

- Affordable Housing;

- Private sector contributions towards education, health and public open space needs as appropriate; and
- Public realm enhancements.

Morrisons/Eastern Gateway Site

The redevelopment of this site, which includes the existing Morrisons supermarket and Council multi-storey car, would have significant benefits in both urban design and townscape terms. However, this is viewed as being a long-term development opportunity only. This reflects the desirability in planning terms of maintaining Morrisons continued presence in the town centre but also the limited commercial incentives to the operator to replace the existing surface level car parking with more costly decked car parking as would be required in order to release this land for further development.

However, should this situation change in the future, potential exists in physical terms for the site's redevelopment to accommodate additional retail floorspace with residential development above in the form of 3 storey blocks. This could provide:

Retail (new Morrisons store)	5,500m ² (gross)
Retail	3,850m ² (gross)
Residential	105 units
Car parking at surface and basement levels	

Planning Obligations

Through the redevelopment of the area the Council would seek to secure through Section 106 and 278 Agreements:

- Affordable Housing;
- Private sector contributions towards education, health and open space requirements, as appropriate; and
- Public realm enhancements.

Executive Summary

Monkspath Hall Road Car Park

The part redevelopment of this site for a new bus and rail interchange (together with new car parking facilities) has already been identified as a possible key component part of Phase 3. Potential also exists to accommodate residential and/or further commercial office development on the site. Under the Phase 3 Development Scenario we have identified the capacity of the site deliver 375 residential apartments in addition to the proposed public transport interchange. As an alternative development option we consider that the site also has the physical capacity to accommodate alongside the previously identified transport infrastructure the following scale of development:

Residential	220 units
Commercial Office	11,000m ² (gross)
Decked / basement level car parking	

Planning Obligations

Through the development of the area, the Council would seek to secure through Section 106 and 278 Agreements:

- Revised Bus Routings;
- Junction Improvements at Lode Lane/ Station Road, Princes Way / Monkspath Hall Road, Lode Lane / Warwick Road;
- Affordable Housing;
- Private sector contributions towards educational, health and open space needs, as appropriate;
- Public Realm enhancements; and
- Cycle parking facilities.

Part Seven – Delivering the Strategy - The Policy Framework

This section considers the process that the Local Planning Authority will need to follow to enable the Spatial Vision, Strategic Objectives and potential development opportunities to be incorporated into the LDF policy framework

guiding the development of Solihull town centre and wider network of centres.

Table 2 below summarises the report/recommendations on the nature and scope of the policy framework which the Council will need to put in place during the preparation of its suite of Development Plan Documents in order to deliver the recommended Spatial Vision for Solihull Town Centre.

Table E2: Development Plan Documents

Core Strategy DPD	Centres DPD	Development Control DPD
The hierarchy of centres	Town Centre and Primary Shopping Area boundaries	Criteria based policies for unallocated sites
Strategic positioning (sub-regional or other)	Site allocations (boundaries and scale/mix of uses)	Generic town centre design policies
The spatial strategy for Solihull (based on retail/housing led growth) and other centres (based on consolidation around private sector-led proposals)	Phasing of allocations (if any)	Parking standards
Quantum of growth - convenience /comparison retail and phasing (if any)	Centre/site specific design guidance	Landscape policies
Quantum of growth - other main town centre uses (leisure, offices and housing)	Centre/site specific transport policies	Protection/frontage policies
Relationship with centres beyond Solihull's boundaries	Planning contributions from allocations	Control of A2 - A5 uses
Transport strategy for centre – key targets	Protection/frontage policies	
Balance between in and out of centre B1(a) office development		

Part Eight – Delivering the Strategy - Implementation Plan

The final section of the report identifies how the strategy will be delivered and provides examples of potential delivery vehicles and mechanisms, which the Council might wish to promote.

The Study highlights the need for the Council to develop an Implementation Plan that identifies the key projects that underpin the implementation of the strategy, when they will take place and which body is responsible for action. The Implementation Plan should provide a broad framework within which

more detailed delivery plans will need to be prepared on a project by project basis, to sit alongside the emerging LDD's.

Key actions are set out below:

Planning

- Maintain and protect the potential role of Solihull Town Centre through the RSS Revision process;
- Prepare Solihull LDD Core Strategy to provide a policy framework for investment and continuing improvement of the town centre;
- Prepare and adopt an Action Area Plan (AAP) which will provide a medium to long term route map and policy context for development of the town centre;
- Prepare a town centre design code;
- Produce key site development briefs (SPD's);
- Consider the extent to which planning obligations (S.106) could contribute towards town centre improvements.

Transport

- Develop a new town centre transport 'model';
- Prepare a town centre car parking strategy;
- Work with Centro/bus operators to expand the network of high quality Bus Showcase/Red Routes serving the town centre;
- Consider potential funding options;
- Undertake feasibility study of a new public transport interchange at Monkspath.

Delivery

- Review the estate implications of SMBC's service delivery strategies;

Executive Summary

- SMBC to continue dialogue with Police and Magistrates Courts on their estate strategies and related programmes;
- Maintain regular engagement with interested developers/ landowners in the town centre to achieve a co-ordinated approach to major scheme development;
- Carry out a detailed feasibility study of the Touchwood (Phases 3A and 3B) developments to consider the potential to deliver future Council accommodation requirements as part of the proposals and likely implications (in terms of procurement, funding and timing) of this approach;
- Consider land assembly implications, in particular the need for compulsory purchase, if required;
- Assess phasing of public transport and highway improvements to ensure no delay will occur in development coming forward; and
- Explore phasing and construction management considerations to minimise development impacts and disruption to operation of the town centre.

The delivery plan will need to be flexible to respond to changing market dynamics and public sector priorities and resources. It must be underpinned by a commitment to project implementation; appropriate promotion of the town and 'place marketing'; encouragement of highest possible design quality; a holistic approach to regeneration; and 'early wins' to build investor confidence.

Delivery Vehicles and Mechanisms

Local Development Vehicle

Solihull town centre will be a focus for considerable growth up to and beyond 2021. This growth will require coherent guidance from a strategy which includes a deliverable vision, robust strategic objectives and a sound delivery plan. The present town centre management arrangements would not appear

adequate to co-ordinate this significant level of change – a new structure will be required. This must involve the local authority given its large landholding interest and critically should be properly resourced.

LDVs can, for example, be given specific responsibilities to drive forward sustainable development in a town centre. They can use land assembly, investment and planning powers (their own or using the powers of other agencies) to create confidence and stimulate private investment to enable Government and local community objectives to be realised.

Recent experience has underlined the importance of:-

- Ensuring access to adequate and committed funding both operational and capital prior to establishment of the LDV.
- Recognising that private investment will not just 'happen' – public funds and/or contribution of assets will often be needed as a catalyst to stimulate private sector involvement.
- Ensuring adequate resources – to project manage and co-ordinate complex development projects. The availability of appropriate skills will be key.
- Recognising that the LDV must adopt an entrepreneurial approach that is innovative, not risk averse and drives the delivery of projects within defined timescales though in a manner consistent with community needs and aspirations. This requires strong leadership and would build upon the track record and success the Council has enjoyed previously in the town centre and elsewhere.

The report identifies a number of LDV structures which range from formal LDV Models to Private Sector Models and Local Authority Joint Ventures. It also summarises the benefits and disadvantages of adopting any of the alternative approaches highlighted.

The delivery model adopted must reflect local circumstances, in particular, it must ensure proper co-ordination of phased redevelopment linked to key improvements to town centre infrastructure. This could involve the setting up a formal LDV structure or more likely (bearing in mind the potential high

private sector development interest) should be based on a less formal partnership model involving key public and private sector stakeholders. In this model, Solihull Council would retain the lead role and planning powers and working with private sector partners would be the driving force behind the delivery of schemes within the town centre. This approach would remove the need for a complex legal partnership but nevertheless would enable a co-ordinated approach to opportunities and development implementation within the town centre. To provide the appropriate level of focus, the Council may wish to consider the creation of a separate 'delivery body' set up specifically to implement town centre development which will be distinctive from the local authority but nevertheless would use its powers and resources as appropriate.

The issue of delivery of town centre development in the context of this study will require further consideration once the Council has a clearer view on future plans for its estate in the context of the emerging town centre Area Action Plan.

Part 1: Introduction

Introduction

1.1 Consultants Brief and Study Objectives

Solihull Council in their study brief require an authoritative view to be provided on the ways in which Solihull Town Centre might develop in the future.

This Study has been prepared to inform the development of a Town Centre Strategy for Solihull up to 2021 to identify growth that is deliverable from both a capacity and market perspective. This will provide part of the evidence base to underpin the preparation of the Core Strategy and Town Centre Area Action Plan/Centres Development Plan Document (DPD).

The following key objectives have been considered as part of this Study:

- Building further on the retail success of Touchwood e.g. retention of the quality and distinction of the existing 'offer';
- Working closely with Morley Fund Management to determine the future of Mell Square;
- Reflection on the deliverability from both a capacity and market perspective of the demand identified for the town centre in Roger Tym's West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy – Regional Centres Study which may translate into policy in the RSS Stage 2 Review;
- Consideration of opportunities for growth in the town centre through mixed use development that is deliverable from a capacity and market perspective;
- Conservation of character (e.g. recognising urban design strengths and addressing its weaknesses);
- Impact of any growth on the transport infrastructure, car parking and the potential need for modal shift;
- Identification of potential delivery mechanisms to facilitate the implementation of the Council's preferred option for the future development of the town centre;

- Development of effective partnerships with the private sector to facilitate and deliver necessary and beneficial change; and
- Exploitation of the opportunities emerging from the new planning system to both promote and guide necessary development and effectively resist inappropriate change.

1.2 Principal Components of the Study

GVA Grimley, working with Urban Designers, Tibbalds, and Transportation Engineers, Mott MacDonald, were appointed by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council during April 2006 to prepare this possible Town Centre Strategy for Solihull Town Centre.

Six Direction Papers were produced at the outset, which set the baseline position in the following areas:

- Development/ property market;
- Retail policy;
- Town centre healthcheck;
- Public sector assets;
- Transport; and
- Urban design.

A summary of these Papers is provided in Part 2 of the report, with the full document provided at Appendix 1.

Working with the client a Vision and Strategic Objectives (Part 3) have been agreed and spatial options relating to development and growth in both commercial and residential markets in 5 year phases up to 2021 have been considered and evaluated.

This Study draws together the key outputs of this work and identifies development opportunities (in 5-year phases) key spatial principles and information on project delivery to guide development of the town centre.

1.3 Study Process

The methodology for the Study was agreed at the outset and a programme agreed. This is shown overleaf in **Figure 1.1**

As part of this programme a number of key milestones were identified. These related to each of the following:

- Production of Direction Papers;
- Targeted stakeholder consultation;
- Preparation of a Spatial Vision and Strategic Objectives;
- Agreement and evaluation of strategic options; and
- Development of a preferred option, including phasing proposals.

Presentation of this Town Centre Study is the final project milestone of this Study and pulls together the work completed to date into a comprehensive town centre study, including the composite part discussed in Stage 6 of **Figure 1.1**.

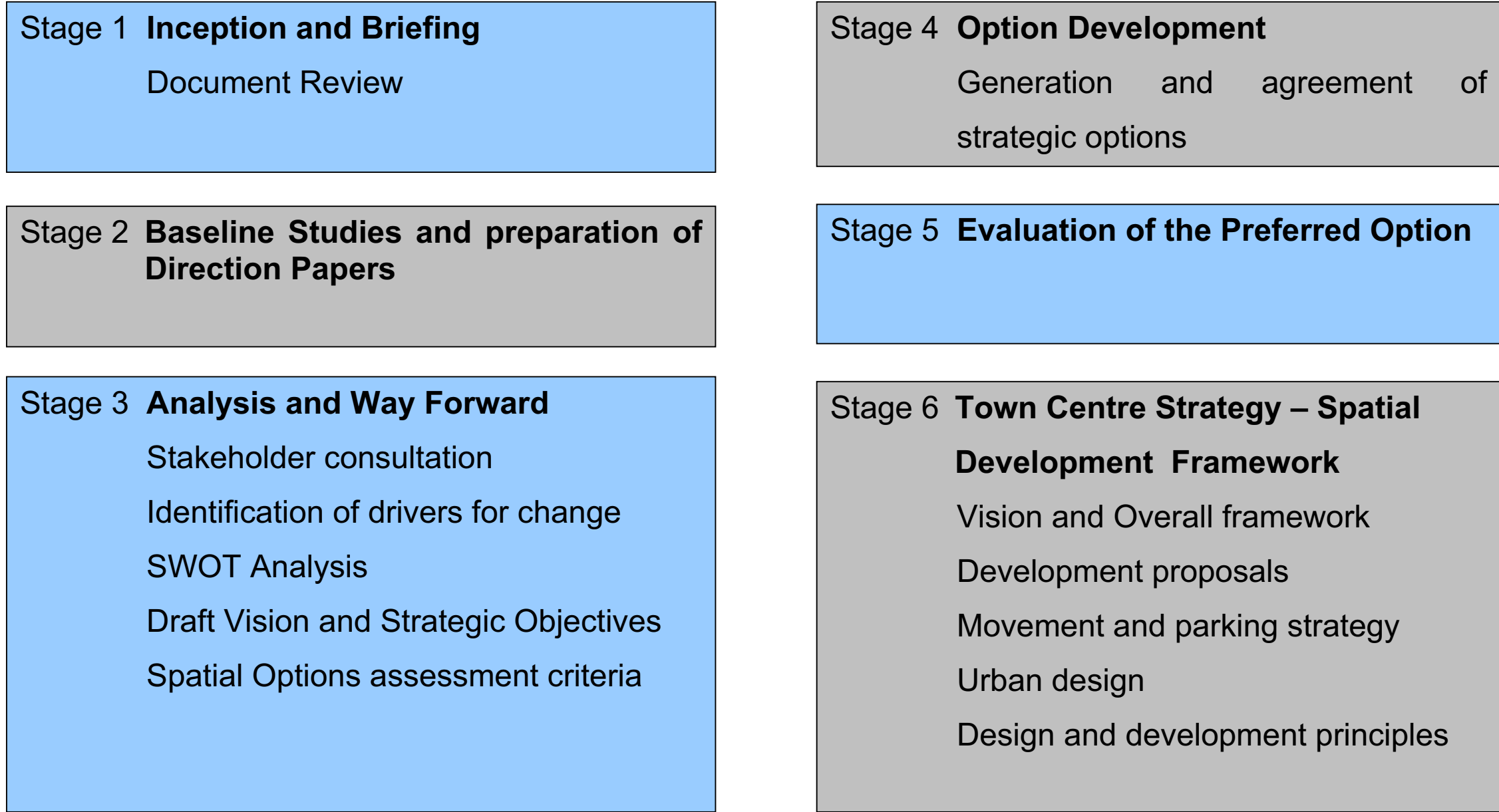
1.4 Structure of Report

The report is structured into 8 chapters or 'parts' with separate sections. Technical appendices accompany it. The report is structured as follows:

- Part 1 – Introduction
- Part 2 – Where Are We Today?
- Part 3 – Where Would We Like To Be?
- Part 4 – How Do We Get There?
- Part 5 – The Spatial Strategy
- Part 6 – Delivering the Strategy – Phasing
- Part 7 – Delivering the Strategy – The Planning Policy Framework
- Part 8 – Delivering the Strategy – Implementation Plan

The next section of the report (Part 2) identifies the background to the project, (including a brief description of Solihull town centre), an overview of the key issues emerging from the Direction Papers, a summary of the key challenges and a discussion on why change in the town centre is necessary.

Figure 1.1: Study Methodology





**Part 2:
Where are we
Today?**

Part 2 – Where are we today?

2.1 Solihull Town Centre - Context

Solihull town centre is located on the south east fringe of the West Midlands Conurbation in the western part of the Borough. It is a town centre of growing significance in the regional hierarchy owing to the volume and quality of its comparison goods offer. It is the administrative and commercial centre for Solihull Borough, and contains the main Council administration functions and extensive commercial office space. **Figure 2.1** shows the location of Solihull in the context of the West Midlands conurbation.

The structure of the centre's retailing is loosely orientated around the linear pedestrianised High Street with the recent Touchwood Shopping Centre lying to the south and the 1960's Mell Square development to the north. Extensive office and hotel development is found beyond this, to the south and north, with Solihull railway station located to the west on the Chiltern line to London.

The High Street, Mell Square and Touchwood Shopping Centre make up the primary shopping area, with the prime pitch considered to be the Crescent Arcade Mall within Touchwood. Secondary frontages are found on Station Road and Poplar Road, to the west of the main retail area.

Solihull is one of 25 'strategic centres' listed in the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) as being the focus for most major new retail development (10,000 sqm and above), large-scale leisure and B1 (a) office development and other town centre development. However, there are no policies in the current UDP (2006) that reflect the centre's strategic significance or provide guidance on the scope for change over the period of the RSS (to 2021). This Town Centre Study seeks to address this and provides a much needed 'long term vision' for Solihull up to 2021.

The economic performance of Solihull town centre is important to the continued growth and prosperity of the Borough as a whole. As the principal centre in the Borough for retail, leisure and service uses, it has a significant role to play in driving the growth and economic development of the Borough in the future.

The development of Touchwood has significantly enhanced the role of the town centre in terms of both the quantum and quality of retail floorspace, as

has the opening of the only John Lewis store in the West Midlands. Despite this, other parts of the town centre, including Mell Square, have seen a decline in their environment and retailer representation. The future of Mell Square will have a key role to play in the development of Solihull town centre to 2021.

2.2 The Study Area

Figure 2.2 overleaf identifies the study area and the proposed town centre boundaries. At the commencement of the study, the study area was extended to include the area around the existing railway station, the Solihull Hospital site to the north of Warwick Road, and the Monkspath Hall Road car park site. These were included to explore possible future linkages, development opportunities and development synergies within the town centre.

The proposed town centre boundary shown in blue in **Figure 2.2** overleaf indicates the consultants recommended extension to the designated town centre, and includes the Monkspath Hall Road car park site because of its potential to be developed as a town centre related transport interchange and major mixed use development site.

2.3 The Direction Papers

Six Direction Papers were produced as a first task which set the baseline position in the following areas:

- Development/ property market;
- Retail policy;
- Town centre healthcheck;
- Public sector assets;
- Transport; and
- Urban design.

The following sections identify the key issues and opportunities that flowed from the preparation of the Direction Papers. These are provided in full at **Appendix 1**.

2.4 Development and Property Market

The key issues that emerged from this Direction Paper are identified below, split by reference to each property market sector that was considered.

Retail

- There is continuing demand and interest from operators and developers for development (land and built floorspace) in the town centre. This is due, in part, to the 'commercial' success of the town centre from a property angle and the perception of a strengthening retail market in the town;
- The development of Touchwood has heightened the perception that Mell Square is becoming tired and is starting to show its age, albeit the 'Touchwood effect' has generally improved Solihull's, and indeed Mell Square's, overall attractiveness to shoppers;
- Whilst improvements to Mell Square can be addressed by investment in the property by Morley Fund Management, Touchwood's future extension has estate management implications for Solihull Council which owns the adjacent land and property;
- The need to consider the relationship between Mell Square and Touchwood and creating an attractive linkage between the two centres;
- Improvements to Mell Square should be encouraged; and
- The linkage between the Morrison's site and the Post Office site at Mell Square. The Morrison's store does not provide an attractive gateway to Solihull on the busy Warwick Road, but it is very successful commercially. The Post Office may seek to relocate some of their 'sorting' functions to a site on the town's periphery – this would enable better linkages between the Morrison's site and a new (redeveloped) Mell Square.

Part 2 – Where are we today?

Offices

- There is a need to define the Solihull town centre office 'product' in the context of the significant availability of 'B1' office space in out-of-town business parks along the M42 corridor; and
- Land assembly is a major constraining factor on town centre office growth. This together with competition from sites in the M42 corridor depress potential market demand in the town centre.

Leisure

- There is a need to enhance the 'evening economy' in Solihull. The provision of quality bars and restaurants would help achieve this objective;
- The proposed second runway at Birmingham International Airport and the National Exhibition Centre will continue to be a boost to the local economy and property market overall; and
- Demand also exists for commercial health and fitness related uses.

Residential

- This market sector has a key role in helping to deliver mixed use growth in the town centre;
- Although the 'centre living' market is in its infancy in Solihull, new town centre residential would help diversify the town centre 'offer' and relate well to an enhanced 'evening economy' role;
- Residential use as part of mixed use schemes could provide greater value to make development schemes more financially viable.

2.5 Retail Policy

There are seven principal issues with implications for the town centre study arising from this paper, namely:

- A clear view of the existing position of Solihull town centre in the regional network/hierarchy, and a strategic view of its future position; is a

fundamental prerequisite to decisions on the policy strategy to be set out in the Council's LDF. It is critical also to the Council's response to the review of the RSS;

- Any proposals to refurbish and remodel Mell Square in the short term will achieve the minimum level of growth in comparison goods floorspace advocated for Solihull in the "Regional Centres Study" prepared for the West Midlands Regional Assembly (WMRA) by Roger Tym & Partners (RTP) to inform the RSS Review, and represent consolidation, rather than expansion. They should be encouraged;
- An extension to Touchwood (alongside Mell Square) in the longer term could deliver the maximum level of growth in comparison goods floorspace advocated for Solihull in the Regional Centres Study. If the recommendations in the Regional Centres Study are carried through to policy in the RSS, an extension to the "Primary Shopping Area" (PSA) boundary of Solihull town centre to accommodate an extension to Touchwood Court, or a specific allocation for an extension to Touchwood would be required to meet the upper levels of growth identified by RTP.
- An extension to Touchwood would require the Council and/or the Police and Magistrates Court to develop and adopt estate strategies, involving relocation of existing facilities to enable assembly of a site to accommodate an extension, and any displaced uses would need to be accommodated elsewhere, possibly in the centre;
- This level of growth would, however, have significant capacity implications for the highway network and would raise challenging conservation/heritage issues. However, those are unlikely to represent absolute constraints to this level of development within the centre;
- The property market context is considered in Direction Paper No 1 (see **Appendix 1**) which concludes that there are significant opportunities to deliver not just retail, but also office, leisure and residential development in the centre; and
- In relation to the other three centres considered in the wider brief (Shirley, Chelmsley Wood and Knowle) all perform District Centre roles

serving their local catchments. The policy approach to be adopted for all three should be to consolidate their role rather than to compete with Solihull.

2.6 Town Centre Healthcheck

Solihull town centre performs well against key viability and vitality indicators, is commercially attractive from an investor point of view, and is a centre of significant importance for comparison goods (being particularly well represented by high-quality operators). There is developer interest and consumer demand for further retail space in the town (as well as improvements to existing premises). As a consequence, this Town Centre Study needs to consider the extent of the Primary Shopping Area boundary in order to accommodate future development.

There are opportunities to develop the evening economy of Solihull town centre by diversifying uses to include more high quality restaurant/leisure uses (A3, A4, A5/D2 uses). Such proposals could add to the potential attractiveness of Solihull as a location for new high-density 'Centre-Living' style apartments.

Solihull suffers from congestion at peak times and this reflects the fact that most consumers arrive by private car. There are opportunities to increase the use and quality of public transport as part of a strategy to reduce car journeys to the centre. At present the Solihull railway station/ bus interchange have poor access to the town centre exacerbating this problem. This points to a need to consider alternative solutions to providing effective and well connected rail and bus access.

A SWOT Analysis in relation to Solihull Town Centre, is provided in Table 2.1 on the following page.

Part 2 – Where are we today?

Table 2.1: Solihull SWOT Analysis (May 2006)

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Broad retail offer including an excellent range of high quality comparison retailers ▪ Good representation of multiple retailers (comparison) ▪ High quality and well maintained built environment ▪ CCTV ▪ Extensive low-cost car parking ▪ Good air quality ▪ Excellent pedestrian access within centre ▪ High volume (and frequent) bus services linking centre with wide geographical area ▪ Nearby rail access ▪ High daytime population due to extensive edge-of-centre office developments and education institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Access via alternatives to the car not attractive ▪ Congestion on roads leading to the centre at peak times ▪ Quality of buses serving the centre are poor (in terms of passenger comfort) ▪ Poor linkages between rail station and centre ▪ Inadequate provision for cyclists ▪ Limited evening economy ▪ Few independent retailers ▪ Limited convenience retail ▪ Conflict between buses and pedestrians in Western part of centre ▪ Absence of development sites
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Town centre living (including LOTS) ▪ Develop evening economy ▪ Improve linkages between rail station and centre (or potential to relocate station) ▪ Better provision for cyclists within centre and surrounding routes ▪ Upgrading of Mell Square ▪ Potential, longer term, to expand Touchwood Centre ▪ Scope to rationalise public sector estate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Further development of Birmingham and Coventry City Centres as more dominant retail centres ▪ Further development of NEC for leisure and retail uses ▪ Growth in out-of-town retailing ▪ Increased traffic congestion (local roads and motorway network) ▪ National/regional economic decline ▪ Policy framework prevents ability of centre to maintain/improve its retail position and/or respond to changing market requirements

2.7 Public Sector Assets

The Council is the freeholder of Mell Square and any future redevelopment of Mell Square could provide an opportunity to secure significant physical and environmental improvements to the town centre. The Council need to decide over the next 12 months whether it wishes to make significant investments in the physical fabric of the Council House and Civic Suite in order to continue with the current use of these buildings. The outcomes of the Town Centre Study driven, in particular, by the aspirations of Lend Lease to extend Touchwood Court, have an opportunity to influence the Council's consideration of this issue through the 'Life Cycle Costings Scrutiny Process' which will guide future investment by the Authority in its estate.

The structure and delivery of services of the West Midlands Police Force and HM Courts Service is currently under review, although the implications this has for their future within Solihull Town Centre is not certain at this time. However, if both organisations were to reconsider the nature of their future representation in Solihull town centre, it could open up the opportunity to consider the redevelopment of their existing sites for a range of alternative uses.

2.8 Transport and Movement

The Transport Position Paper has identified a number of key issues that will be critical in informing the policy directions in the Town Centre Study, and can be summarised as follows:

Current levels of congestion on the roads serving the centre

- Little opportunity for major road upgrades;
- Need to focus on more efficient use of existing roads through traffic management and selective junction improvements;
- Possible extension of pedestrianised areas including those in Mell Square; and
- Future transport pressures from other major developments within Borough.

Car Parking

- Provision of minimum parking standards for new developments and a need for agreement on parking rates;
- Better use and management of existing car parking facilities through selective car parking charges and VMS signing; and
- Greater understanding of private non-residential parking (PNR) stock within the centre.

Public Transport Provision

- The bus is regarded as the mode of last choice and there is a need to make further improvements to bus patronage and passenger comfort;
- There is a need for a more centralised interchange;
- Better use of rail services may be made for those working in the town centre through park-and-ride; and
- Improved public transport accessibility could be achieved through extension of bus priority.

Encouraging Sustainable Modes of Travel

- Walking/cycling trips into the centre are not expected to increase significantly but;
- Pedestrian links within the centre and to/from car parks and public transport interchanges are a critical input into option development; and
- Other measures such as encouragement to car sharing may be considered as part of Travel Planning.

2.9 Urban Design

This Directions Paper considered the following, all of which are addressed below:

Part 2 – Where are we today?

- Historic Character;
- Land Uses;
- Landscape and Topography;
- Character Areas;
- Positive Townscape; and
- Negative Issues.

Historic Character

Solihull's town centre expanded from that of a traditional village high street within a rural area with the improvement of rail and local links to Birmingham and London from the late 1880's. Until the late 1950's town centre uses remained focussed along the High Street, Poplar Road and Warwick Road.

The most significant growth occurred in the following four decades with the development of Mell Square shopping centre, the construction of Princes Way, major office and civic development along Homer Road, and most recently the development of Touchwood shopping and leisure centre.



The historic origins of the centre are still firmly rooted along the pedestrianised High Street with St Alphege Church and square at its end, and many buildings of historic and townscape value merit retention.

The Mell Square development has enabled the historic street pattern to be retained. More recent environments, with a compact retail core and a more fragmented urban form at the edges, are dominated by cars and through traffic.

Land Uses

The two large retail malls of Mell Square and Touchwood, and the High Street between them, form a compact retail core. The Morrison's supermarket with its large surface car park is to the east of this core but is poorly connected to it.

Office uses are concentrated predominantly in large floorplate buildings to the south of Homer Road. Smaller concentrations of office uses in finer grained buildings are at the edge of the centre, across Warwick Road and along Station Road.

Civic uses including the police station, magistrates' court, Council offices and the library and theatre lie between the Touchwood Centre and Homer Road. Overall, the centre is characterised by a high degree of zoned separation of uses with relatively little mixed use developments.



Figure 2.3 overleaf shows a plan of the different land uses in Solihull town centre.

Landscape and Topography

Most of the town centre occupies a relatively flat plateau site which falls away to lower lying land to the south, east and west. The slope to the south and the railway line on a raised embankment is particularly marked.

Large areas of open space with residential neighbourhoods around them adjoin the town centre to the south (Tudor Grange Park), east (Malvern Park) and north (the ground and playing fields of Solihull School).

St. Alphege Churchyard and Golden Jubilee gardens are the only significant and visually attractive areas of greenspace within the centre. The paucity of green open space in the centre is compensated for by the visually strong and

attractive presence of street trees, particularly along Church Hill Road, parts of Princes Way and Warwick Road alongside Solihull School.



The most significant urban spaces in the centre are the High Street and Mell Square. The High Street is a very attractive linear space defined by its predominantly historic building frontages and, with St. Alphege Church at its end, it provides the centre with its most distinctive place-making element. Mell Square is the centre's largest civic space, but has dated 1960's character and feels oversized for the scale of buildings around it and activities and features within it. **Figure 2.4** identifies these key features.

The Library Square is poorly connected and not an obvious through pedestrian route, and is dominated by blank walls. The internal malls and spaces within Touchwood provide a comfortable, weather-protected pedestrian environment and are physically and visually well connected to the High Street.

Character Areas

The various characteristics outlined and set out in detail in the Urban Design Direction Paper combine to create a number of clearly identifiable, but overlapping character areas (see **Figure 2.5** overleaf).

These are:

Part 2 – Where are we today?

- **The High Street;** the historic heart of the centre with a pedestrianised public realm and flanked by predominantly 2-3 storey buildings of high townscape and historic quality, anchored at the end by the landmark of St, Alphege Church and environs.
- **Mell Square;** which has a dated appearance, retains a largely open street pattern with the square at its centre, and is generally characterised by predominantly 2 storey retail buildings with a tall office tower and Beatties department store at its northern end.
- **Touchwood;** the new high quality shopping centre with its internal streets and spaces, that has extended the retail core across the High Street.
- **Civic Quarter;** the cluster of civic buildings, each on their own site, with little visual harmony or coherence between the different elements.
- **Office Quarter;** dominated by individual large floor-plate buildings with extensive parking areas in their grounds.
- **Edge of Centre Areas;** where the scale and intensity of uses falls away along New Road and Station Road, and the incongruous area around the Morrison's superstore and multi-storey car park at the eastern approach to the centre.
- **Warwick Road;** the traffic dominated northern edge to the centre which presents a significant barrier to pedestrian movement, and which lacks attractive and consistent building frontages.

Positive Townscape

The positive and attractive elements of the town centre form and townscape are:

- The High Street as a whole;
- The numerous listed and other historic buildings within the Town Centre Conservation Area;

- St Alphege Church with its landmark spire which is visible in many close and distant views;
- The well connected network of external and internal streets and spaces that support permeability and legibility within the retail core of the town centre;
- The presence of mature street trees, particularly along Church Hill Road and parts of Princes Way, Homer Road and Warwick Road; and
- The proximity of adjacent parks, residential areas and Solihull School that provide clearly identifiable and attractive townscape edges to the centre.



Functionally the centre also has the positive attributes of being easily walkable, having a good range of shops including department and variety stores, having cultural and leisure facilities of the library, theatre and multiplex cinema, and being well served by public transport. These are identified in **Figure 2.6**.

Negative Issues

The features and characteristics that detract from the quality and appearance of the town centre are predominantly around the edges (see **Figure 2.7**).

These include:

- Visually weak approaches or gateways into the town centre that do not support a sense of arrival and are generally traffic dominated;
- The town centre ring road that encourages high traffic volumes and acts as a major barrier to pedestrian movement to and from the town centre;

- Large, unattractive buildings that are visually dominant or inappropriate such as the multi storey car parks, Morrison's supermarket with its typically suburban or out of town building and car park, the council offices block and the hotel at the southern approach to the centre;



- Numerous poorly defined or unattractive street frontages, particularly along Princes Way and parts of Warwick Road. This is particularly the case around the 'ring road' along Princes Way, Warwick Road, Lode Lane and around the station. These streets are dominated by traffic at the expense of the pedestrian, do not have a sense of enclosure and are not overlooked by active town centre frontages.
- Visually dominant ramps, service entrances and service yards along parts of Warwick Road; and
- The outdated character of the Mell Square development and the unattractive nature of some of the pedestrian routes within the town centre, such as the links from the Lode Lane car park to Poplar Road, the enclosed link from Poplar Road to Mell Square, and the pedestrian only links from Tudor Grange Park and from Monks Hall Path car park to Homer Hill.



Part 2 – Where are we today?

2.10 Conclusions from Direction Papers

The key conclusions from the six Direction Papers, are as follows:

Development and Property

- Build on commercial success of town.
- Potential exists to redevelop and extend Touchwood and Mell Square.
- Organisational and political will exists to achieve a level of intervention on key development/gateway sites (e.g. Council offices, Police HQ, Magistrates Court).
- A market exists for the speculative/planned development of a specific town centre office product.
- Opportunities exist for the development of the 'evening economy' (e.g. an increase in quality bars/ restaurants).
- The promotion of a 'Centre Living' product would help in diversifying Solihull's offer, releasing pressure for residential development on other sites and enhance development value as part of a wider mixed use offer.

Retail and Town Centre Policy

- The ongoing review of the RSS will define the network of regional centres and (probably) identify in policy the level of growth that each might sustain.
- There is a need to deliver a considered spatial planning strategy for Solihull town centre, and the network of centres in the Borough, to meet the requirements of Government policy as set out in PPS6 and PPS12.
- Steps should be taken to encourage and channel the growth of other "main town centre" uses in the centre (including residential, office and leisure) to diversify the town centre offer in line with policy aspirations in PPS6.

- There is a need to consider further how development opportunities including Mell Square and any Touchwood extension should be tested and, if appropriate, incorporated as a firm proposal policy in the LDF.

Town Centre Healthcheck

- Quantitative and qualitative demand exists from developers, investors and shoppers for further retail development in the town centre:
- The redefinition of the Primary Shopping Area boundary and town centre boundary of Solihull town centre should be considered in order to accommodate future development;
- The evening economy should be developed to include more high quality restaurant/leisure uses (A3, A4, A5 and D2 uses). These uses would add to the attractiveness of Solihull as a location for new high density 'Centre-Living' style apartments;
- Consideration should be given to the introduction of measures to reduce congestion at peak times (e.g. increase the use of public transport as part of a strategy to reduce car journeys to the centre and encourage a modal shift); and
- Consideration of alternative solutions to provide better connected rail and bus access due to these interchanges being divorced from the town centre.

Public Sector Assets

- Agreement needs to be reached between the Council and Morley Fund Management on the redevelopment potential of Mell Square and adjoining sites. In addition, it may be necessary to identify an alternative site for the Post Office if the development potential of Mell Square to be maximised;
- The 'Life Cycle Costings Scrutiny Process' needs to be completed by the Council in good time in order to inform, and be informed by, the Town Centre Study; and

- Similarly, the outcome of any estate review process undertaken by the West Midlands Police Force and HM Courts Services need to be considered to inform preparation of an AAP for the town centre. In this regard, ongoing dialogue should be maintained with these organisations.

Transport and Movement

- There is a lack of road capacity to accommodate additional traffic;
- Government and Regional transport strategies seek to reduce car trips;
- A reduction in the number of available parking spaces could drive the use of more sustainable modes of travel if it is matched by a parallel improvement in the choice and quality of public transport provision available;
- Environmental considerations – pollution, traffic noise, accidents; will have an impact on peoples decision to visit the centre.
- Maintaining and improving accessibility to the centre will remain important if Solihull is to retain it's competitive position.
- Despite such aspirations, there will be resistance to change amongst the car-owning majority for all trip-types because the town centre is currently very car-friendly.

2.11 Policy Context

At the national and regional level, planning policy is set out in Planning Policy Statements (PPS's), Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPG's) and the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS). This Study respects fully the objectives of these policy tools. The most relevant to the Town Centre Study are:

- PPS1 – General Policy and Principles (2005)
- PPG3 – Housing (2000)
- PPS6 – Planning for Town Centres (2005)

Part 2 – Where are we today?

- PPS11 – Regional Spatial Strategies (2004)
- PPS12 – Local Development Frameworks (2004)
- PPG13 – Transport (2001)
- PPG15 – Planning and the Historic Environment (1994)
- West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy – RPG11 (2004); and
- West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy - Regional Centres Study (March 2006)

The relevance of all of the above policy documents to this Town Centre Study is reviewed at **Appendix 2**. Of particular importance is the Regional Centres Study, which is discussed below.

West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy – Regional Centres Study (March 2006)

Retail Capacity Projections

It is important to understand the broad level of retail capacity that the town centre could accommodate in the light of demographic and economic influences in order to inform the scale of retail proposals in this Town Centre Study.

It is not a requirement of the Study Brief that the consultant undertakes a retail capacity study of the borough at this time.

For the purposes of this study, consideration of retail capacity issues is based upon the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy – Regional Centres Study (March 2006). The main findings of this study prepared by Roger Tym & Partners (RTP) on behalf of the West Midlands Regional Assembly are described below.

Key Findings

In January 2005, the West Midlands Regional Assembly commissioned Roger Tym & Partners to undertake the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy – Regional Centres Study (WMRCS). The prime purpose of the study and its principal aims were to provide a clear guide to: -

the scale of retail, leisure and office development that should be accommodated in the Region in the period to 2011 and, in more broad indicative terms, from 2011 to 2021;

how any identified growth in demand for retail, leisure and office development should be distributed across the region, taking into account the provisions of the adopted development plans;

how any identified capacity can be diverted to those centres which will best promote accessibility and use of sustainable modes of transport, are least likely to undermine vulnerable centres and best meet any gaps in retail, leisure and office provision across the Region; and

market perceptions of the opportunities for major investment.

It is important to note that the Regional Centres Study provides a guide for the scale of development needed and how this growth should be distributed in broad terms across the region. The study, therefore, provides an overview of total regional capacity and then indicates how this global capacity should be distributed amongst strategic centres. The study is not a detailed capacity assessment for each town centre, rather it is a broad-brush guide for how total capacity for the region should be distributed at a purely strategic level. Non-strategic centres are grouped together, along with out-of-centre development, and individual centres are not considered. Survey data is used to review existing networks and catchment areas, and expenditure growth is used as the basis for assessing capacity. As a result any major deficiencies in existing provision of retail facilities and any capacity in individual centres which already exists at the study base date are excluded.

Health Checks

The vitality and viability of each centre has been assessed in the Town Centre Healthcheck Paper as part of the Centre Study by using a wide variety of PPS6 based criteria. These criteria are then combined to grade each strategic centre. Solihull is rated a strong centre (with a grade of 1 out of a grading system of 1 – 5). Solihull, along with Birmingham, are the only strategic centres to be rated as being very healthy.

Growth Options

The study identifies a global capacity figure for the region and this figure is then apportioned between the PA 11 Strategic centres under 11 different options, reflecting different weightings for different sizes of centres. Actual commitments in each centre are then deducted to give a residual floorspace capacity for each strategic centre. Each of the 11 options are then scored against a variety of criteria and an overall score given for each option. The highest scoring options are then considered further and floorspace capacity figures are identified to give a range of capacity figures for each centre. For Solihull, the figures are 25,000 sq. m sales area to 33,000 sq. m sales area. Translating these net sales figures into gross (at a net/gross ratio of 70%) implies capacity for an additional 36,000 sq. m to 47,000 sq. m gross additional comparison floorspace. Solihull is defined as a centre which is expected to consolidate, rather than expand as it is considered to have some significant constraints (physical/topographical, infrastructure and conservation) which are not insurmountable *“but will require substantial joint public/private action and/or remodelling of the centre”*.

Study Conclusions

Section 8 of the WMRCS has a number of key messages. Once again it is emphasised (paragraph 8.49) that there is a need (PPS6 requirement) for a pro-active approach to promoting growth and managing changes in the network of strategic centres. Paragraph 8.53 states that there is a need for a Plan, Monitor and Manage approach to the accommodation of need for town centre uses. It also emphasises the uncertainties in making projections of need, with certain critical variables that require careful monitoring – expenditure and population growth rates, the proportion of expenditure accounted for by e-tail and change in the turnover per unit sales area of existing retail floorspace.

Section 9 of the WMRCS considers monitoring and thresholds and what constitutes “large scale development proposals”, which should be referred to the RPB. These are not the same as upper limits referred to in PPS6 (paragraph 2.42), which are a matter for local authorities to set in the LDF process when considering the scale of developments likely to be permissible in different types of centres. Large scale development proposals, which

Part 2 – Where are we today?

should be referred to the RPB, does not imply that any proposal of a scale above the referral threshold is necessarily unacceptable.

Paragraph 9.13 states that the threshold for Tier 3 centres (like Solihull) is 10,000 sq m gross, whether developments are within or on the edge of the centre. All out-of-centre schemes have a 10,000 sq m gross threshold. The referral process should be reliant on whether the proposal exceeds the relevant floorspace threshold and whether the application is likely to conflict with, or prejudice, the implementation of the RSS.

However, paragraph 9.14 makes clear that the referral thresholds apply equally to extensions of existing facilities, change of use, renewal of extant planning permissions and applications to vary or remove existing conditions.

Implications for Solihull

The WMRCS is a guide in broad terms for the amount of retail development needed and how it should be distributed amongst strategic centres. It is not a detailed capacity assessment for each strategic centre and non-strategic centres are all grouped together, along with out-of-centre retailing, and hardly considered at all. The Study assumes that, in aggregate, the strategic centres are neither over or under-trading, but this may not apply to any strategic centre individually.

The basic assumptions in the WMRCS about expenditure growth and sales density increases appear reasonable, but the assumptions about e-tailing are pessimistic as the Study recognises. The latest thinking suggests that e-tailing's share of comparison goods expenditure in 2021 would be about 12% rather than 20% (as assumed in the Study). The sensitivity analysis in Section 3 (Table 3.3) of Technical Paper 5 suggests that altering this assumption would increase the total floorspace capacity in the WMSA by 234-270,000 sq. m sales area, or about 32-37%, a significant amount. If applied to the Solihull figures, capacity would increase from 25-33,000 sq. m sales area to 33-45,000 sq. m sales area.

Even this figure assumes that 12% of expenditure would be lost to e-tailing and mail order etc and would thus reduce the amount of floorspace capacity required, but this is by no means certain. Floorspace capacity may be

boosted by the need to retain floorspace to fulfil a showroom function even if sales eventually occur on the internet and it may be required as a pick up point for internet purchases.

The second assumption that can be contested is the assumption that the strategic centres are, in aggregate, neither over nor under-trading, so that capacity is purely determined by population and expenditure per head growth. The Study admits that the survey evidence suggests that over-trading, in aggregate, may well be occurring but this is ignored due to the problems of quantification. Furthermore, it may also be the case that Solihull itself is actually over-trading. The household survey suggests the baseline comparison goods turnover in Solihull was £485.7M (2001 prices). Accurate floorspace figures are difficult to obtain, but Experian Goad figures are 53,700 sq. m gross of comparison floorspace (as at 12 December 2005).

Assuming that this figure is reasonably accurate, this is equivalent to about 37,600 sq. m sales area (an assumed 30% reduction to reflect storage space) and this gives a sales density of about £12,918 per sq m. This is an exceptionally high figure and more than double the average figure for new floorspace of £5,500 per sq m used in the Study to convert capacity into its town centre floorspace equivalent. This suggests that there is an error in the survey data (household survey or Goad survey) or a considerable need for additional floorspace to overcome current over-trading, as well as future expenditure growth, (i.e. in addition to the floorspace capacity referred to in the Study and mentioned earlier). This is acknowledged in passing by the WMRCS (although not specifically for Solihull), but is not quantified by the WMRCS and is ignored in the floorspace capacity figures for Solihull.

It should be noted that the Regional Centres Study is not an adopted planning policy document. Solihull MBC must decide the extent to which it wishes to challenge the basis or conclusions of the consultant's assessment. At the time of preparing this report we have had no indication from either the RPB or the Council as to nature of any future policy revisions to the RSS arising from their consideration of the consultant's report. We assume, therefore for the purposes of this Study that the conclusions of the WMRCS are likely to be incorporated substantially unaltered in to the review of the

RSS. If this were to be the case it would suggest that the RSS Review might include:

- (i) the definition of a hierarchy of centres, within the network of defined centres:
- (ii) definition of comparison goods retail, office and leisure floorspace requirements up to 2011 (and to 2021) for the region, and each strategic centre within the region (possibly via floorspace ranges for each centre); and
- (iii) possibly, suggestions for the phasing of new comparison goods retail development between centres to allow for growth first in the most vulnerable of centres, particularly in the Black Country.

It is against this background that the study considers the opportunities available in Solihull to accommodate the levels of growth identified in the WMRCS.

Also of relevance at the key conclusions set out in Direction Paper 1 (Development and Property), included at Appendix 1 which provides a market view on the potential for fuller retail and leisure development in Solihull town centre. These are set out below:

Retail Market

- Zone A rents of around £205 per sq.ft and a yield of 4.25% in the town centre.
- Solihull attracts shoppers from a wide catchment area and has a comprehensive representation in terms of top 20 retailers.
- High levels of demand for vacant space (which is in limited supply).
- A thriving town centre core anchored by Touchwood, John Lewis and Beatties.
- Strong out-of-centre provision.

Part 2 – Where are we today?

- Generally prosperous town centre with surrounding district centres; Chelmsley Wood requires major improvements to survive; Shirley whilst declining relatively remains a more viable district centre. New proposals will assist both centres in terms of viability.
- A potential second runway at Birmingham International Airport would extend the retail capacity at the airport;
- Potential relocation of some of the Post Office ‘back functions’ to an out of centre site – would provide a larger developable area in Mell Square;
- Potential development of a Touchwood Phase 2; and
- Possible long term plans for redeveloping the Morrisons site, but keeping the current occupier as the anchor tenant.

Leisure Market

- Good access to the motorway network, proximity to the NEC and Birmingham Airport and an affluent catchment area, make Solihull a prime location for more hotels;
- There is a reasonable offer of restaurants, bars and cafes but these could be improved, and more high quality restaurants established;
- There is a large number of leisure facilities; and
- Leisure is an area, which has great potential to be developed more in the future.

Office Forecasts

The West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy – Regional Centres Study identifies office floorspace needs in the West Midlands and for individual centres within the West Midlands for the period 2001 to 2021. It does this by producing a baseline forecast, and then evaluating five policy intervention scenarios. Finally, the report produces a recommendation in terms of scenarios and their associated office space requirements.

Background

There are 25 ‘strategic centres’ in the West Midlands, one of which is Solihull. The research also defines five levels of hierarchy, based on current employment and office floorspace. Birmingham is the top level of hierarchy, with an index score of 100, whilst the second level of hierarchy is represented by two centres – Coventry and Wolverhampton. Solihull is one of six centres in the third level of hierarchy, with an index score of 6.6.

In 2004, the supply pipeline in the West Midlands (completed developments, development under construction and with planning permission) totalled 1.01 million sq m. 27.6% (279,100 sq m) of this was in Birmingham local authority district, whilst Solihull had the second highest amount of space in the pipeline, at 16.4% of the total (166,000 sq m).

In Solihull as a whole, ‘In-Centre’ development accounts for only 3% of the total office space with planning permission (4,200 sq m), compared with 97% (161,900 sq m) in ‘Out-of-Centre’ locations. For the West Midlands as a whole, 29% is in ‘In-Centre’ locations.

The majority of office development in the West Midlands is expected to occur in the Major Urban Areas (MUAs), which include Solihull. However, the report notes that of the MUA districts, “only Solihull had the scale of outstanding permissions that would signify substantial growth in relation to the size of the existing stock in the short term”.

Baseline Office Forecasts

Forecasts for office employment growth were produced by Cambridge Econometrics for the period 2001 to 2021 for the local authority districts within the West Midlands. These are based on extrapolating past trends in employment change, and do not, therefore, take into account future policy initiatives or the physical capacity of centres. These factors have been the subject of additional modelling.

The regional baseline forecast is for a gain of 207,900 office jobs from 2001 to 2021. For each strategic centre, four different employment forecasts have been produced, and a baseline forecast has been produced by averaging these four forecasts. The four forecast scenarios are:

- (i) Historic trend;
- (ii) Regional trend; and
- (iii) Physical capacity adjustment. Each centre was classified into one of three categories. These were:
 - Optimistic (Green) – physical capacity exists for future in-centre development, adding 1 percentage point per annum to the ‘historic trend’ forecast
 - Achievable (Amber) – some physical constraints exist, but an active policy approach could have a positive impact. No change has been made to the ‘historic trend’ forecast
 - Difficult (Red) – substantial physical capacity constraints, deducting 1 percentage point per annum from the ‘historic trend’ forecast
- (iv) Market opinion adjustment. This takes into account the views of market representatives on factors such as accessibility, the availability of labour, quality of life and local economic structure. Centres have been classed as
 - ‘positive’ (Green) – employment grows by one additional percentage point above the ‘historic trend’ forecast
 - ‘development expected to grow at the same pace as in the past’ (Amber). No change has been made to the ‘historic trend’ forecast
 - ‘ominous (Red), deducting 1 percentage point per annum from the ‘historic trend’ forecast

In terms of physical capacity, Solihull has been classified as ‘achievable’ (amber), with the following comment. “A conservation area runs east-west through the centre, and there is also a shortage of readily developable sites.

Part 2 – Where are we today?

However, there may be some long-term expansion potential to the north of the centre, where office development has already breached the ring road”.

In terms of market outlook, Solihull has been classified as ‘positive’ (green), with the report stating that “the market would deliver more office development in the centre if more land was available”. Solihull is one of only four centres identified in this category (the others being Leamington Spa, Stratford-upon-Avon and West Bromwich), and the report notes that it is unsurprising that three of these centres (including Solihull) are amongst the most physically attractive in the region.

The following table summarises the results for Solihull, and provides a comparison with all strategic centres, the remaining centres, and the region as a whole.

Table 2.2: Forecast Gains in Office Employment (2001 to 2021)

Location	Historic Trend	Regional Trend	Physical Capacity Adjustment	Market Opinion Adjustment	Baseline Forecast
Solihull Strategic Centre	4,927	2,458	4,927	6,968	4,820
All Strategic centres	70,277	79,785	74,367	73,556	74,496
Remainder of Region	137,647	128,139	133,557	134,368	133,428
Total for the Region	207,924	207,924	207,924	207,924	207,924

Source: West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy – Regional Centres Study – Technical Paper 6

The study then converts the employment figures to floorspace, using an employment density ratio of 18 sq m per job.

Recommendations

The final report puts forward recommendations for a range of office floorspace requirements to 2021. The following table shows the recommendation for Solihull, together with those for all strategic centres, the remaining centres, and the region as a whole.

Table 2.3: Recommendations for Office Needs across the network of Strategic Centres

Location	Minimum Requirement	Maximum Requirement
Solihull Strategic Centre	100,000 sq m	100,000 sq m
All strategic Centres	1,490,000 sq m	1,660,000 sq m
Remainder of Region	2,240,000 sq m	2,080,000 sq m
Total for the Region	3,740,000 sq m	3,740,000 sq m

Source: West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy – Regional Centres Study – Final Report March 2006

The report considers that all strategic centres in the West Midlands must make some provision for new office floorspace. For Solihull, the requirement arising to 2021 is forecast at 100,000 sq m of office space, which accounts for 2.7% of the total for the region as a whole.

Implications for Solihull

The study does not examine the characteristics of the Solihull office market in any detail, as this is a regional wide study. Whilst an assessment is made in terms of the effect that physical constraints and the attractiveness of Solihull could have on office development, this is relatively brief.

The resulting adjustments to the growth rates seem somewhat arbitrary (no adjustment for Solihull is made for physical constraints and an additional percentage point added to the employment growth rate for market attractiveness). A more detailed analysis of the prospects for the Solihull market could potentially give a very different view of the future office development need.

Additionally, in calculating the baseline figure for each strategic centre, a weighting of 25% is derived from the average for the region as a whole, which provides a distortion to the figures for high growth centres like Solihull.

A review of the wider property market has been undertaken as part of this Town Centre Study. The key conclusions are noted in Parts 2.3 to 2.6 of this report.

Direction Paper 1 (Development and Property) provided at Appendix 1 offers a development view of the office market, the key conclusions of which are summarised below:

- Lack of development within the town centre due to an absence of potential sites and oversupply of out of town office accommodation (M42 and other Business Parks).
- In terms of supply, there has been development of business parks in greenfield locations and along the M42 corridor e.g. Blythe Valley Park and Birmingham Business Park. This provides high quality locations and although targeted at a different market to the town centre, there are for some companies those that are able to trade in both locations.
- Town centre locations are attracting more occupiers but Solihull needs to define its office ‘product’ to be able to develop its own market and compete effectively with the (non RIS) out of centre Business Parks.
- The Council offices (and Police station) could provide a longer term development opportunity e.g. through relocation/downsizing.
- The Solihull town centre is often analysed together with the M42 Business Park market, although in reality it is more closely allied with the Birmingham city centre office market.
- Utility firms and HQ’s are the largest occupiers.

In addition to this office agents at GVA provided a purely ‘commercial’ view of the Tynm’s Centres Study and what would be the unconstrained development potential of Solihull. This takes no consideration of existing allocations in the UDP or planning policy constraints and is purely commercially driven. It presumes that all land/ property in the town centre at present could be brought forward/ redeveloped for commercial use. This needs to be heavily caveated, as it is a pure ‘commercial view’. Due to the radical nature of options discussed below it would require significant Vision and political ‘buy in’ from the Council to come to fruition.

The key points noted by our office agents were:

Part 2 – Where are we today?

- The town centre of Solihull is currently constrained in development terms and therefore struggles to provide a viable alternative for office users to the out of town parks. Current availability on out of centre sites equates to 52.75 hectares and 500,000 sqft of surplus stock. Despite this if the centre can develop a critical mass of professional services companies like in Birmingham that need to be in the centre this type of office market activity will grow.
- The RTP figure of 100,000 sqm of office demand for Solihull Town Centre is unrealistic without radical intervention by the Council in taking the initiative to create available sites to provide this amount of space. Radical development opportunities that would help to deliver this quantum of floorspace could include:
 - Complete redevelopment of Mell Square for mixed use, with a high proportion of offices at higher levels;
 - Reduction in Solihull School playing fields;
 - Use of open land to the west of the School;
 - Future rationalisation of the hospital site;
 - Redevelopment of the Triangle site due to its close proximity to Touchwood;
 - Redevelopment of the whole Council site;
 - Office buildings along Homer Road on both sides could be demolished to facilitate new development (when the offices were built the sites were not pushed to maximise density levels, their current life span is a key factor as is the potential relocation/ rationalisation of the Magistrates Court/ Police HQ facilities); and
 - Surface car parks (there is too much surface level car parking for such a vibrant Town Centre).
 - Values are high enough within the centre to enable sites to be packaged and sustainable development principles adhered to. Due to this

developers would be willing to take the financial 'risk' in the knowledge that if a product i.e. a site was made available a market is likely to emerge.

In taking the findings of the Roger Tymns Study into account we have also considered market and physical capacity and deliverability issues which lead us to consider that the consultants have been rather 'optimistic' in their views on the Town Centre's capacity to accommodate the level of development suggested

The next part of the report identifies 'where we want to be' by introducing the proposed Vision and Strategic Objectives which will underpin Solihull Town Centre's growth and development up to 2021.

**Part 3:
Where would
we like to be?**

Part 3 – Where would we like to be?

3.1 Introduction

The importance of Solihull Town Centre as a focus for continuing economic, social and community activity within the Borough of Solihull cannot be over-estimated. Its buildings and public space provide it with a unique identity and sense of place.

The quality of these aspects, combined with the range of shopping, services and cultural activities are critical to its long term success.

Maintaining and enhancing the quality of the town centre will be crucial if Solihull Town Centre is to retain its competitive position within the wider West Midlands region and within the Coventry/Solihull and Warwickshire sub-region. The town centre has a multi-functional role serving the whole community. Its relatively high level of accessibility for all modes of travel, including public transport, means that it has a vital part to play in achieving a more sustainable development pattern in the Borough.

The present focus upon the need to accommodate significant new growth within the West Midlands Major Urban Areas (including the Birmingham/Solihull Growth Point Area) underlines the unique opportunity that now exists to attract further new interest and investment in Solihull Town Centre. This requires a widely shared 'vision' to direct and co-ordinate proposals and a framework for action.

This Town Centre Study crystallises this vision – a vision which draws on the distinctive and different qualities which make the town a unique and vibrant place which can support a range of facilities and compete fully with nearby towns in terms of economic growth and investment.

In order to set the basis for developing the strategy it was felt necessary to prepare a Spatial Vision and Strategic Objectives to guide the preparation of development options.

In order to develop the Vision the key findings from the Direction Papers identified in Part 2 of this Study were reviewed. From these key drivers for change were identified which the town centre vision should seek to address. These include the following:

- The review of policy in relation to centres at the strategic (RSS) level;
- Strong market demand for diversified town centre uses;
- The need to define Solihull's future role and strategic positioning within spatial planning policy;
- Accessibility/ sustainability as potential constraints to development;
- A parking strategy that will encourage access by greener travel modes without discouraging investment in the centre and to maximise the capacity of existing transport infrastructure;
- Competition/ maintaining investment value;
- The need for public sector occupiers to consider their estate strategies as a means of creating development opportunities;
- Deteriorating environmental quality in parts of the town centre;
- The diversification of use to the character of the centre; and
- The availability of development opportunities means that a comprehensive strategy is required to guide their coming forward.

3.2 A Vision Statement for Solihull Town Centre

The vision adopted in this Town Centre Study encapsulates a deliverable set of aspirations that takes into account both national and local planning policy imperatives as well as responding to issues highlighted in our analysis of the profile and performance of Solihull town centre.

The following Spatial Vision to guide development of Solihull Town Centre to 2021 has been used as part of this Study and has been agreed with Officers and Members of the Council:

- Solihull must remain a thriving, high quality and distinctive town;
- A sustainable, attractive, interesting, safe and enjoyable to visit and diverse in its range of uses; although
- A greater variety of shops, town centre living, offices, employment and leisure activities;
- A higher quality public realm as a priority;
- Good access for all with reduced conflict between traffic and

pedestrians.

- Assets enhanced and integrated with distinctive and well designed new development
- A prosperous focus for all of the Borough's citizens.
- A place of quality and distinction.

The Vision is underpinned by the Strategic Objectives that are identified below.

3.3 Strategic Objectives

The vision is complemented by six strategic objectives:

To develop an aspirational, but deliverable, strategy for Solihull Town Centre

To build upon the town's existing assets, including its heritage, to create a distinctive place to shop, work and live;

To enhance the accessibility of the centre by all modes of transport through appropriate measures to reduce congestion and encourage travel by public transport;

To provide a framework for the phased delivery of key developments;

To promote high quality and sustainable urban design and to make Solihull a special place by creating a distinctive and competitive town centre based around an appropriate mix of uses;
To create a focus for long term investment and imaginative promotion of the town centre which secures wide support from all sections of the community within the Borough.

Part 3 – Where would we like to be?

3.4 How will this be achieved?

The Study has been prepared in such a way to ensure that the challenges and strategic objectives identified above are fulfilled. In particular, Solihull town centre will look to diversify its uses base and develop into a more mixed-use centre that provides a market for increased commercial and residential uses.

There will be a range of ways through which this vision will be achieved. Chief amongst these will be:

- Continuing community support;
- Long term political commitment to achievement of a common vision and its strategic objectives including the promotion of Solihull as a town centre of sub-regional significance;
- The close alignment of the Council's overarching estates and service strategies with its land use policies for the future development of the town centre;
- Securing significant private sector interest in investment (implementing the redevelopment and reconfiguration of Mell Square will be critical here);
- Complementary public sector intervention (in areas such as land assembly);
- An effective delivery mechanism that will lead co-ordination of development opportunities and their presentation to the market;
- Recognising that significant growth in the Borough brings with it major opportunities to exploit growing demand for services and increased local expenditure commensurate with the town's sub-regional role;
- Creation of 'project champions' to advocate, lead and support the implementation of key components of the town centre vision locally, regionally and nationally; and

- An effective and responsive planning system that minimises delays in decision making.

The key structuring elements can be summarised as follows:

- **Consolidation of existing Retail Core:** by the improvement of Mell Square, incorporating new and improved retail, A3, A4 and A5 uses and new residential above;
- **Extension of the High Street Axis:** By incorporating new ground floor retail, A3, A4 and A5 and commercial uses in redevelopments to either side of Station Road, with new residential above;
- **Further Expansion of Retail, Leisure, Cultural and Civic Uses:** By redevelopment to the south of Touchwood and east of Mell Square;
- **Reinforcing the Western Edge:** By the redevelopment of the Lode Lane and Station Road sites for mixed use, predominantly residential development;
- **Consolidation of the Office Quarter:** By incorporating new development with positive frontages onto Princes Way as well as Homer Road;
- **Creating New Residential Quarters:** By developing sites for medium density housing within easy walking distance of the centre;
- **Ring Road Enhancement:** By reinforcing and creating boulevards with substantial street trees, improved frontages addressed by buildings and active uses rather than car parks, blank walls and service areas, improved junctions and pedestrian crossings, and positive management of traffic flows;
- **Environmental Enhancement of Other Key Roads:** By promoting positive and active frontages, improved facilities for pedestrians and cyclists and landscape improvements to the public realm;
- **Improved Access to the Centre:** By encouraging greater use of public transport through a closer, better connected station and bus interchange,

improved bus services into the centre with a new bus mall in Poplar Road. This will be complemented by accommodating the car in a series of multi-storey / underground / rooftop car parks around the edges of the centre, together with better shared utilisation of existing private car parks; and

- **Providing a Connected Network of Streets, Paths and Spaces:** By ensuring that new development provides the key north-south and east-west pedestrian links that connect destinations and link to the existing grid of routes, and that high quality public spaces are incorporated.

3.5 What factors will be key to the success of the Vision?

Of critical importance to the delivery of the vision for the development of Solihull town centre, is the need to recognise that its future growth is constrained by the capacity of the transport network which serves it. Therefore development must be phased and linked to the development of a new integrated transport strategy which promotes and prioritises the use of sustainable transport modes as a preferred means of accessing the town centre.

Without accepting this principle as a key cornerstone of the Council's future strategy for the development of the town centre it is likely that transport capacity constraints will adversely impact on the scale, nature and pace of beneficial change and development in the Solihull town centre.

The factors important to the delivery of this vision therefore include:

- A need to focus on the more efficient use of existing roads through traffic management and selective junction improvements whilst promoting a 'step change' in the use and quality of the public transport services;
- Linking the future physical development of the town centre to the funding and delivery of identified transport interventions.
- Creating a more diverse and vital mix of activities including new leisure and residential uses;

Part 3 – Where would we like to be?

- Securing further quantitative and qualitative improvements in the town centres retail offer through the redevelopment of Mell Square and the possible future expansion of Touchwood Court;
- Supporting and reinforcing the distinctive character and environmental quality of the town centre;
- Much better integration of activities between fringe areas and the town centre core;
- An expansion in pedestrian priority areas and high quality public realm;
- Resourcing and supporting an effective Town Centre Management regime that promotes and co-ordinates future investment in the town centre; and
- Encouragement of significant growth in town centre living as part of single and mixed use development schemes.

The following section, Part 4, identifies how the strategy could be developed.



**Part 4:
How do we get
there?**

Part 4 – How do we get there?

4.1 Introduction

This Part of the report identifies how the strategy could be developed. It identifies the following elements, all of which are critical to its success.

- Achieving Sustainable Development;
- Opportunity Sites in the Town Centre;
- Development of the Strategy; and
- Movement and Transport Strategy.

4.2 Sustainable Development

Why is this a Priority?

Sustainable development as identified in PPS1 is the ‘*core principle underpinning planning*.’ At the heart of sustainable development is the simple idea of ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for future generations.

The most well-known definition of sustainable development comes from the Brundtland Commission’s report of 1987 which is widely credited with popularising the term, describing it as:

“Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

Put most simply, sustainable development is development that lasts, and sustainability is about nothing less than long-term survival.

Achieving sustainable development requires a major reorientation of public and private investment, aimed at decoupling environmental degradation and resource consumption from economic and social development. The planning process plays a pivotal role in its delivery, setting out the key parameters which shape what happens on the ground.

Sustainable development is central to the reformed planning system, as is the undertaking of Sustainability Appraisals (SA) and Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA). These assist in promoting sustainable development through the integration of social, environmental and economic considerations

and are mandatory in the preparation of revisions of Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS), and for new or revised Development Plan Documents (DPDs) and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs).

PPS1 states that:

“Planning authorities should ensure that sustainable development is treated in an integrated way in their development plans. In particular, they should carefully consider the inter-relationship between social inclusion, protecting and enhancing the environment, the prudent use of natural resources and economic development.” (PPS1, para.24, 2005)

The Study Brief does not require a SA of the Town Centre Strategy, however the Council is seeking advice on the application of best practice in bringing forward its Town Centre AAP (or Centres DPD).

Appendix 3 provides a proposed methodology based on Government planning policy, SA guidance and our experience of the important role that SEA and SA plays in similar development strategies.

Core Sustainability Aims

A set of Core Sustainability Principles has been developed to underpin the sustainable development vision at the heart of this Strategy.

While rooted in international and national sustainable development strategy and guidance, these principles have been shaped and refined to reflect the unique challenges and opportunities presented by this Town Centre Strategy.

The importance of achieving sustainability in new development has never been greater and is a rising priority at national, regional and local levels of planning policy.

Appendix 3 outlines in detail five key areas (or aims) that, in combination, provide a high level framework that has guided the approach to sustainability adopted in this Town Centre Strategy. Some will be more relevant to town centre development, but all need to be considered to ensure that sustainability principles are applied in developments. These five key areas are:

- Moving to a low carbon economy;
- Increasing resource efficiency;
- Enhancing environmental assets;
- Enhancing quality of life; and
- Ensuring economic sustainability.

Each of these aims is supported by a set of ‘core sustainability principles’ (**Appendix 3**). These principles highlight some of the ways in which sustainability can be maintained and embraced through the life of the proposed Town Centre Strategy leading Solihull towards a truly sustainable future. They are consistent with those factors identified as critical to creating ‘sustainable communities’ and will be key in guiding development in the town centre in the future.

4.3 Delivering the Vision – Solihull Town Centre

In order to deliver the Vision for Solihull Town Centre described in Part 3 of this report, it is necessary to consider the strategic scenarios available to the Council to achieve the Council’s aims and objectives. In preparing this study we have considered three strategic scenarios. These are:

- Consolidation;
- Market Led Growth; or
- Managed Growth.

The key characteristics of each of these strategic scenarios and their implications for the future development of the town centre are summarised below.

Consolidation

This strategic approach to planning for the town centre represents a “do minimum” scenario. Under this scenario it is assumed that only limited further growth in retail, leisure or office development will be promoted in Solihull with the objective minimising the impact of further development on the town centres transport infrastructure and environment. A consequence of this approach is that the Council need not plan to extend the boundaries of the town centre beyond those currently identified in the adopted Solihull UDP.

Part 4 – How do we get there?

In terms of development, a limited refurbishment of Mell Square would be expected to proceed with small-scale retail, leisure and residential “in-fill” developments coming forward on a piece-meal and opportunistic basis. Without a proactive approach towards further land assembly there would be little or no prospect of any additional office development being promoted in the town centre given the lack of available sites. In promoting necessary transport improvements the Council would continue to be reliant on the allocation of resources through the West Midlands Local Transport Plan (LTP) process.

In the short term the adoption of this strategic approach is unlikely to have any discernible impact on the overall viability and vitality of Solihull town centre. However, in the medium to long term the competitiveness of the town centre would begin to steadily erode relative to other centres that become a focus for new investment and expansion. This is likely to arise due to:

- Limited private sector investment in the range and quality of the town’s retail offer;
- A failure to grasp the opportunities offered by the Solihull’s strategic location and market support to increase the amount of commercial office floorspace and employment in the town centre;
- A failure to maximise the opportunities to promote the concept of town centre living in Solihull and its future contribution to meeting the Borough’s wider housing needs;
- A failure to diversify the range of town centre activities and attractions to enhance Solihull’s overall vitality and attractiveness relative to centres elsewhere;
- Continued decline in the quality of the town centre environment arising from limited reinvestment in the centres physical fabric and pedestrian environment;
- The adverse impact of increasing levels of traffic congestion and a failure to enhance the relative attractiveness and use of public transport in accessing the town centre;

- A failure to exploit the opportunities provided by new development to secure additional funding to improve the transport infrastructure serving the town centre, including the range and quality of town centre car parking provision; and
- A failure on the part of the Council to maximise the contribution of its own land and property assets to maintaining and enhancing the competitiveness of Solihull town centre and the opportunities to secure new civic, community and cultural facilities in the town centre.

Market Led Growth

Under this scenario it is assumed that the Council allows the market to determine the scale and nature of new development within the town centre. This approach would seek to capitalise on the strength of the centre as a retail destination and as a focus for commercial office activity. In order to facilitate this approach the Council would need to be proactive in the use of its land and property assets, including, where necessary, the use of land assembly powers to provide suitable development opportunities for new retail, residential and office development.

In order to encourage significant new investment in the town centre, the Council might also adopt a more relaxed attitude in respect of urban design considerations, particularly in relation to the scale, massing and design of new retail or office schemes. Underpinning this approach would also be the need to ensure ease of access to the town centre by the car. This would require further junction and highway capacity improvements and increased levels of car parking provision to meet rising demand. In this scenario the developer would be responsible for the funding of all necessary infrastructure improvements.

Although the adoption of a market led approach might initially find support from developers, the pursuit of such a strategy is ultimately likely to become “self consuming” as the promotion of unrestricted levels of growth rapidly becomes unsustainable. This is likely to give rise to the following impacts:

- A potential over supply of retail floorspace relative to market demand leading to falling rental levels across the centre. This would serve to

undermine long-term investment values and create a strong disincentive to further investment.

- The presence of vacant and underused retail floorspace having an adverse impact on the overall attractiveness of the town centre. In the short to medium term, high land values and retail rental levels would “squeeze” out the opportunity to attract a wider and more diverse range of uses and activities.
- The town centre’s character and environment being adversely affected by inappropriate large-scale development. Without proper control and protection, the town centre’s distinctive environment could be lost, with Solihull becoming “anywhere town”.
- The implementation of major junction and highway capacity improvements necessary to support the increased levels of development activity would have a significant adverse impact on the environment of the town centre and surrounding areas.
- The unrestricted provision of new car parking spaces would undermine all efforts to promote access to the centre by public transport thereby increasing congestion levels further.
- Increased levels of traffic congestion and longer journey times deterring shoppers from visiting Solihull in preference to those centres which offer easier and safer access by a choice of transport modes; and
- Finally, it should be noted that adopting a market led approach would be inconsistent with national and regional planning policies that seek to promote a “balanced network of centres” as defined by PA11 (WMRSS). Future delays in obtaining planning permission for town centre development proposals due to opposition from neighbouring local authorities would only undermine Solihull town centre’s competitive position relative to its rivals.

Managed Growth

Under the managed growth scenario, future levels of growth are closely tied to the physical capacity of the centre and it’s infrastructure to accommodate

Part 4 – How do we get there?

further development. Consistent with this approach the overall scale, mix and phasing of new development should be determined having regard to the following:

- The need to ensure that the scale and nature of new development is consistent with the principle of maintaining Solihull's role and function as part of a balanced network of centres within the West Midlands regional network of town and city centres;
- The transport and environmental capacity of Solihull town centre to support further development without an adverse impact on its character or quality of environment;
- The need to promote sustainable transport choices and improve modal split through the adoption of an appropriate centre wide car park management regime and the delivery of public transport improvements funded through developer contributions and the West Midlands LTP;
- The opportunities available to the Council to exercise influence over the scale, nature and quality of new development arising from its position as a major land and property owner within the town centre and as Local Planning and Highways Authority;
- The need to maintain and enhance investment values through the phasing of development in order to promote a process of continued investment and reinvestment in the physical and economic fabric of the town centre;
- The need to diversify the range of activities and uses found in the centre with a particular emphasis on centre living; and
- Protecting heritage and creating/ reinforcing local distinctiveness.

Evaluation of the Strategic Scenarios

The relative merits of each of the scenarios described above were subsequently evaluated against a set of strategic criteria including market demand, planning policy and sustainability considerations. Key town centre stakeholders were also consulted. Based on this assessment the 'Managed

Growth' scenario performed best in relation to the potential to achieve and satisfy the strategic objectives agreed for Solihull town centre. Table 4.1 below sets out our assessment of performance.

Table 4.1: Evaluation of Strategic Options

Strategic Criteria	Alternative Strategic Options		
	Consolidation	Market Led Growth	Managed Growth
Planning Policy	✓	X	✓✓✓
Sustainable Development Principles	✓	X	✓✓✓
Market Factors	X	✓✓	✓✓✓
Physical and Environmental Capacity of Town Centre	✓✓	X	✓✓✓
Transport Considerations	✓	X	✓✓✓
Urban Design Considerations	✓	✓	✓✓✓
Resources & Deliverability	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓
Views of Key Town Centre Stakeholders	X	✓	✓✓

Following our evaluation of the strategic options identified above it is our recommendation that the Council adopt a strategy of "Managed Growth".

This would provide the most sustainable approach for achieving the Vision for Solihull Town Centre. It is against the background of this policy approach that we set out in the remainder of this report the component parts of the Managed Growth strategy and the key actions which the Council and its partners will need to undertake to deliver the Vision.

4.4 Town Centre Opportunity Sites

The Urban Design Direction Paper identified a range of specific opportunities for consolidating and widening the range of uses, increasing height and density, reinforcing character areas, enhancing the public realm, improving links and connections and provide a less traffic dominated environment.

As part of this strategy we have undertaken a review of town centre development opportunities. These have been evaluated, in terms of their capacity, availability and suitability in meeting the floorspace projections set out in the West Midlands Regional Centres Study (WMRCS), and have been assessed against the following factors:

- **Existing land uses and availability**, categorised as follows:
 - Short term – potential to be completed by 2011;
 - Medium term – potential to be completed between 2011 and 2016; and
 - Long term – likely to be completed in the period 2016 to 2021 and beyond.

This categorisation has been used as a basis for generating the phasing policy framework set in Part 6 and summarised in Table 4.1.
- **Commercial potential for retail/leisure development and the most likely form of development**, categorised as follows:
 - Prime site – likely to attract a developer or occupiers;
 - Off-prime site – could attract specific forms of retail use; and
 - Secondary site – may generate limited demand.
- **Potential scope to accommodate additional retail/leisure floorspace (net increase)**, categorised as follows:

Part 4 – How do we get there?

- Large scale – over 10,000 sqm gross floorspace
- Medium scale – over 5,000 to 10,000 sqm gross floorspace; and
- Small scale - 2,500 to 5,000 sqm gross floorspace

- **Potential development constraints;** and
- **Possible alternative uses.**

The overall potential of each opportunity, taking on board all of the factors listed above. Has been categorised as follows:

- **Good** – development sites that have good prospects for providing additional retail/leisure or other floorspace, and should be considered for implementation in the short term to medium term;
- **Reasonable** – development sites which are well located and may provide potential additional floorspace, although obstacles for development will need to be overcome; and
- **Poor** – development sites that may be unattractive or unsuitable for retail or leisure development and where their delivery is uncertain.

It should be noted that the evaluation undertaken for each site is not a detailed planning appraisal and does not imply that planning permission should be granted or refused for retail/leisure development. However, the evaluation identifies potentially suitable development opportunities that may be worthy of further consideration by the Council as part of the process of preparing a Development Plan Document for Solihull Town Centre.

Evaluation of Potential Development Sites

Each opportunity site has been evaluated based on the factors listed above, and is summarised in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Site Evaluation and Phasing Summary

Site and Phasing	Potential Scale of Retail/Leisure Development	Potential Availability	Overall Development Potential
Mell Square (Phase 1)	Large scale	Short term	Good
Lode Lane (Phase 2)	Small scale	Short term	Reasonable
Triangle Site (Phase 2)	Small scale	Short term	Reasonable
Magistrates Court/Police Station (Phase 3A)	Large scale	Medium term	Reasonable
The Council House (Phase 3B)	Large scale	Medium term	Reasonable
Monkspath Car Parks – Residential/offices (Phase 3/4)	Not applicable	Long term	Reasonable
Station Quarter Site (Phase 4)	Not applicable	Long term	Reasonable
Morrisons (Phase 4)	Medium scale	Long term	Poor

There are a number of strategic development opportunities that have good or reasonable development potential for retail and or mixed uses that could be implemented in the short to medium term (i.e. by 2016).

The key development opportunities identified include the opportunity to pursue the redevelopment and reconfiguration of Mell Square, and the potential to secure any further proposed expansion of Touchwood. However, the latter would require (as part of its second phase) the relocation of existing uses including the Police Station, the Magistrates Court and the Council House. In quantitative and qualitative terms two development opportunities provide sufficient physical capacity to accommodate the levels of growth together suggested for Solihull by the WMRCs.

There may be potential for smaller scale comparison and convenience retail and A3, A4 and A5 uses in other locations within the town centre, including Station Road and Lode Lane. However, none of these sites, individually or collectively, could be regarded as being suitable for accommodating the scale and form of new development required to ever maintain Solihull town centre's competitive position.

Further guidance on the development potential (including development pre-conditions and phasing) of these sites is set out in the remainder of this section.

Other Retail Planning Considerations

The Town Centre Strategy identifies, based on the findings of the WMRCs, the need for significant additional comparison shopping retail floorspace in Solihull over the period to 2021. However, it should be noted that the WMRCs does not consider the need for further convenience goods development in any of the RSS Strategic Centres (Policy PA11), including Solihull. The Council will therefore be required to undertake its own assessment of 'need' in relation to the adequacy of foodstore provision within the Borough (this was not a requirement of this study).

The consultant has not been provided with any evidence that would indicate that there is a quantitative need for additional food store development in Solihull. However, based on our own assessment of the existing town centre convenience offer, we consider that there is a clear qualitative need for further improvements in convenience shopping in the town centre. This would assist in providing effective competition to both existing in-centre and out-of-centre stores located elsewhere in the Borough, and add to the non-comparison goods-retail offer of the centre. The opportunities to address this qualitative deficiency, include the development of a new Sainsbury's store as an integral part of the redevelopment of Mell Square and potentially through the extension or replacement of the existing town centre Morrisons store.

As Table 4.2 shows there are also a number of site specific opportunities within the centre (see **Figure 4.1**) which have significant development potential in the short, medium and longer term. These are summarised below:

- **1. Mell Square:** This is the major short-term redevelopment/refurbishment opportunity to expand and improve shopping and related facilities and introduce a significant element of residential development on upper floors.
- **2. Lode Lane:** This major redevelopment opportunity could replace the unattractive multi-storey car park and the dated, suburban scale uses

Part 4 – How do we get there?

along Station Road which provide a weak and unappealing approach to the centre, with a mixed-use development at a more efficient density that extends the more urban character of the High Street westwards, introduces residential and commercial activity and helps create a much improved northern gateway to the town centre. The opportunity for improved pedestrian links to the railway station should also be explored.

- **3.Station Road:** This is a major opportunity to replace former residential dwellings of a suburban character (and now accommodating low key commercial uses) by a new predominantly residential development with ground floor commercial uses that would create a new eastern urban edge to the centre and form part of a new northern gateway to the extended High Street. The opportunity for improved pedestrian links to the railway station should also be explored.
- **4.Police, Magistrates and Library Site:** In the medium term (up to 2016) there is the opportunity to take advantage of any potential relocation of the Solihull Police Station and Magistrates Court. This site could be redeveloped to form a southern extension of Touchwood with new offices onto Homer Road, to create a new entrance into the town centre from the south. Opportunities might also exist from such a scheme to improve the library, theatre and the setting of Library Square.
- **5.The Council Offices Site:** Another major medium term opportunity could follow any decision by the Council to review its estates needs in the town centre. This might allow for the redevelopment of Councils existing offices to provide a further western extension of the retail core and a significant element of new residential and new civic uses, creating a new southern gateway and edge to the town centre.
- **6.Monkspath Car Park Site:** This represents the most strategically significant opportunity to improve public transport accessibility to the town centre and perceptions of its convenience and attractiveness. The site could accommodate a relocated station and bus station and associated commercial uses close to the core of the town centre. It could also support a substantial amount of new residential development within a few minutes walk of the centre, whilst still retaining the parking spaces it currently provides.

- **7.Station Quarter Site:** The potential relocation of the station and station car park would release a new redevelopment opportunity site for residential and/or commercial development to the west of the town centre.
- **8.Morrisons/Eastern gateway Site:** In urban design and townscape terms the site occupied by Morrisons and the adjoining Council multi-storey car park and filling station could provide a major opportunity to create a new eastern gateway to the town centre that would be of an urban scale and character, use the land more efficiently and improved the public realm and connections to Mell Square. The site's redevelopment could integrate convenience shopping and associated parking, with residential and other uses, with a strong and attractive frontage to Warwick Road and a new public square within.

If these opportunity sites were developed the town centre could become:

- Increasingly competitive with enhanced diversity and mix of uses;
- Structured and distinctive;
- Improved in terms of accessibility; and
- More attractive.

The following section, Part 5 identifies the Spatial Strategy.



**Part 5:
The Spatial
Strategy**

Part 5 – The Spatial Strategy

5.1 Design Process and Objectives

The Vision outlined in Part 3 has evolved through the rigorous and iterative study process and the postulation and testing of numerous spatial and development options. While it is ambitious, it is achievable in the long term, but it must be recognised that circumstances and market conditions can change.

The Spatial Strategy that sets out the principal physical development requirements for successful implementation has therefore been conceived in two inter-related ways that integrate with and, are supported by, the accompanying movement, transport and parking strategy. First, it is expressed as a set of topic related layers that identify, for the future town centre as a whole, the key strategic components of urban form, land uses and activities, links and connections, townscape and urban design elements.

Secondly, it is expressed as a series of phased development projects (referenced in part 6), specifically conceived so that each phase brings about significant improvements to the centre in its own right, and either unlocks or does not compromise the development opportunities identified in subsequent phases.

The spatial framework layers and the more detailed components of the phasing strategy both reflect the following set of design-related objectives, which should also form part of any future briefing documentation for more detailed policies and proposals that will need to be drawn up as Local Development Plan Documents (e.g. in Core Policies, or as Action Area Plans), or as Supplementary Planning Documents, (eg design guidance or design codes) or in site specific development briefs.

5.2 Urban Design Objectives

The key urban design objectives are:

- To achieve a consistently high quality of urban design, architecture and landscape architecture;
- To promote sustainable development through urban and building design that minimises the demands on non-renewable resources, energy and

water consumption and complies with the Council's policies for sustainable development and construction;

- To reinforce the character and distinctiveness of Solihull town centre, by ensuring that new development respects the historic context of the town centre conservation area and reflects the historic pattern of streets, spaces and urban blocks;
- To increase diversity and variety within the town centre by introducing new residential, retail, commercial and leisure uses and promoting well integrated, mixed-use environments and buildings;
- To provide for ease of movement, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists, to the town centre from adjoining areas, and within the centre between points of arrival and major destinations through the integration of a network well-connected and direct streets, routes and spaces;
- To support a high quality of public realm of streets, routes and public spaces that are attractive, safe, lively and pleasant to use;
- To provide for continuity and enclosure through a clear urban form where public and private spaces are clearly distinguished by attractive buildings and landscape that define and enclose them;
- To promote legibility within the town centre as a place that has a clear, positive image and is easy to understand and find ones way around in, with visually clear and attractive gateways, entrances, landmarks and views;
- To reinforce the greening of the town centre and biodiversity within it by integrating existing mature trees and greenspaces and introducing new street trees and amenity greenspace;
- To create a long-term urban structure within which development and uses can adapt and change to meet changing economic and social needs; and
- Fails to recognise potential for improved links between the centre and the station via Lode Lane.

5.3 Urban Form

Figure 5.1 overleaf shows the key strategic components of the recommended future urban structure.

The principal features are:

- The key boulevard routes of Warwick Road, Lode Lane and Princes Way that provide for attractive enclosure and definition of the town centre, as well as access to it;
- The environmental enhancement of New Road, Church Hill Road and Homer Road to reinforce the positive townscape and landscape elements along these key routes;
- The existing High Street, its westward extension along Station Road and its northern extension along Poplar Road, as the key structuring historic streets within the centre;
- The key junctions where these routes connect, and where highway improvements and environmental enhancement must work together to create improved gateways to the town centre;
- The new urban grain within the centre that is defined by the network of new and existing routes and spaces and the uses to be developed, with larger, higher density blocks within the expanded retail core and a finer grain of linear and perimeter blocks around the edges where residential uses predominate;
- The major civic spaces, whether hard or soft landscaped, that sit within the urban fabric at key points of arrival or pedestrian movement intersection; and
- Key internal public spaces within the existing and expanded Touchwood malls at key pedestrian nodes.

Part 5 – The Spatial Strategy



5.4 Land Use

While as rich a mix of compatible uses as possible is to be encouraged in the various parts of the centre and within individual buildings, the predominant uses in proposed new developments, both at street level and on upper floors is indicated on the accompanying land use diagrams. The principal features are as follows:

- The significant expansion of retail uses at ground and first floor level in Mell Square, to the south and east of Touchwood and to the east of Mell Square.
- The provision of a significant element of residential apartments above the retail in Mell Square and its eastward extension.



- The westward extension of the High Street with new restaurant, retail and commercial uses at ground level, with residential above.

- New office development on the north side of Homer Road, which could accommodate some relocated Council functions.
- Improved library, theatre and cultural facilities on the existing library site.



- New higher density residential development at the southern gateway to the town centre, with ground floor restaurant/café/bar uses fronting onto Golden Jubilee Gardens.
- New residential quarters on the Lode Lane, Station Road, old station/car park and Monkspath car park sites.



- The new station and rail/bus/taxi interchange on the Monkspath car park site, with associated commercial/office development around the new station square.
- New multi-level car parks to replace existing facilities on the Monkspath site and the Morrisons/Council car park site.



Figure 5.2 shows the proposed ground floor area whilst Figure 5.3 identifies the proposed upper floor areas.

5.5 Links and Connections

The accompanying diagram (Figure 5.4) shows the proposed hierarchy of clearly legible and connected roads, streets and pedestrian routes to and within the town centre. It indicates;

- The boulevards and main roads providing the principal vehicular access to the centre;
- The locations of key junctions which will have to incorporate safe and attractive pedestrian and cycle crossing facilities into their re-design;
- The locations of other key pedestrian crossings across the main road network; the High Street and its natural westward and northern extensions along Station Road and Poplar Road as the principal open pedestrian spine within the centre;

Part 5 – The Spatial Strategy

- The reinforced and extended grid of north-south and east-west pedestrian routes within the town centre and leading to it; and
- The principal pedestrian links to the town centre from the adjoining public parks.

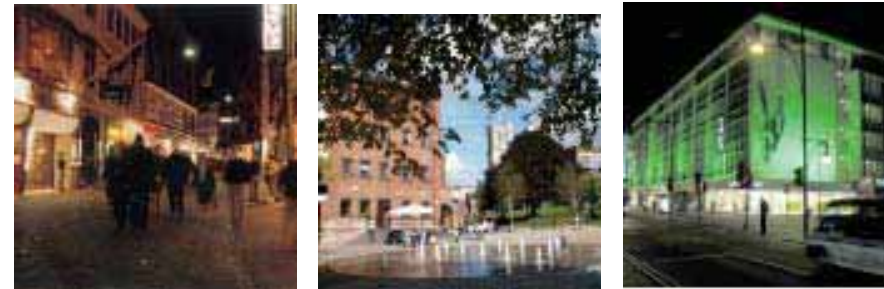


5.6 Public Realm and Townscape

The townscape and public realm diagram (**Figure 5.5**) indicates how the built form of new development should address the public realm of streets and spaces, as well as the key strategic locations of townscape features that will reinforce the identity and image of the town centre and assist legibility within it. The main features are:

- Five strategic gateways at the principal arrival points to the town centre by car, rail and bus, and two local gateways at the eastern and northern entrances to the historic High Street environment;
- The main civic spaces that need to be fronted with active uses and well overlooked by development to provide safe and attractive environments for the activities they support and the people who use them or pass through them;
- The principal High Street frontages that provide animation, continuity and enclosure to the historic linear spaces of the High Street itself and Poplar Road, and to the new, contemporary extension of the High Street environment along Station Road;
- Other strong retail frontages to be created within the Mell Square and Touchwood developments and extensions; and

- Principal existing and new landmark buildings and features to assist legibility and orientation.



5.7 Movement and Transport Strategy

Solihull Current Transport System – Strategic Context/ Base line assumptions

Solihull town centre, as a focus for employment, shopping, health, education and leisure activities, has grown enormously over the past 30 – 40 years. In 2001, around 9,100 people commuted into the town centre to work (excluding the major employment destinations north of the Warwick Road), and a survey conducted around the town centre in 2005 suggested that during the morning peak period alone, almost 20,000 persons travelled into Solihull or passed through it, by all modes of transport. Journeys in private cars accounted for over 80% of these which is not surprising given that Solihull has one of the largest rates of car ownership in the country – reflecting the high per capita income of its residents.

In recent years, the inexorable growth in car commuting into the centre has been curtailed through the imposition of more stringent car parking standards and policies by the local authority, and marked improvements in the quality of public transport, but there is ample evidence that the lack of capacity in the roads system feeding the centre is now acting as a significant constraint on the accessibility of the centre. As a major element of this Movement and Transport Strategy, this study deals with the shortcomings of the highway network and will set out in detail both the location and extent of traffic bottlenecks within the highway network.

Increased demand for travel to/from, and through, Solihull Town Centre

The key movement issues which currently affect the centre are as follows:

- Currently around 68% of people commute by car into Solihull town centre during the morning peak in comparison to around 61% nationally. More encouragingly, 25% of people travel to the centre by public transport compared to only 15% nationally;
- Cycling and walking trips are much lower in Solihull town centre compared to England as whole which may be related to poor quality of walking and cycling facilities and links;
- The highways network around Solihull town centre is currently congested with most routes operating at between 15 and 30kph during the peaks. Long traffic queues are frequently reported on key junctions adjacent to the Town Centre. Targets for congestion set within the Local Transport Plan suggest that traffic flows are expected to increase by 4% between 2004 and 2011, with a commensurate increase in levels of congestion; and
- Overall, parking provision within the centre is adequate for most of the year, and for most trip purposes. However, saturation levels in parking are observed at peak times of the year, such as the pre-Christmas peak. There is little spare capacity however to support further major developments within the town centre, and additional parking must be provided alongside each phase of development.

There is not a major accident problem within the town centre. However, a number of locations exhibit small clusters of similar accident types, such as Poplar Road and the Warwick Road / Lode Lane roundabout, which should be addressed during the emerging planning stages.

Modal priorities (allocation of road space) in the town centre

Solihull has one of the highest car ownership rates in the country at 1.28 cars per household compared to 0.96 for the West Midlands and 1.11 for England. St Alphege ward, adjacent to the Town Centre, has a staggering 1.63 cars per household. The private car, therefore, represents the dominant mode of transport within much of Solihull. It is arguable that for many years, development policy within Solihull has both encouraged and reflected this trend with the inevitable consequences of increasing levels of traffic congestion and pressure on parking. Comparisons of car ownership now and

Part 5 – The Spatial Strategy

in 1991 suggest that there has been around a 10% increase within Solihull, which is roughly comparable to elsewhere in the country.

The dominance of the car as the preferred mode of transport is reflected in journeys to work to Solihull. Around 68% of people travelled to work within the Town Centre by car in 2001 rising to over 70% for the Borough as a whole, compared to around 58% for Birmingham and 61% for England as a whole. More positively, however, almost 22% of people who travelled to the centre for work did so by bus which is almost 3 times higher than both the West Midlands and national rates. Walking and cycling is not well represented in the Town Centre with only around 7% of people travelling to work by those modes, compared to about double that level for the West Midlands and the rest of the country. The reasons behind the low returns for walking and cycling are not clear, but may be associated with travel behaviour encouraged by the high car ownership within adjacent wards, the relative ease of access to car parking spaces and the absence of good pedestrian/cycle links to the Town Centre.

Solihull does, however, have reasonably good public transport facilities with both a bus hub and major railway station in reasonable proximity to the centre. The rail station in particular serves a wide catchment area with frequent semi-fast services to London and Birmingham, and commuter services stopping at intermediate stations between Birmingham and Leamington. One major drawback to the station, however, is its distance from the heart of the town and the connections between the two. The pedestrian route between the two is both long and unattractive, having to cross, several very busy roads by means of pelican crossings and pedestrian facilities at traffic signalled junctions. In addition, a second bus hub on Poplar Road shares the road with large numbers of vehicles which both access the Marks and Spencer's multi-storey car park, and other destinations within the Town Centre, this does not create ideal conditions for either buses or for passengers wishing to use them.

Improvements to the public transport system within the centre will, therefore, require a certain amount of network (roadspace) re-allocation at the expense of the private car to encourage the shift in mode towards increased use of both buses and trains. How this can be achieved is discussed in more detail later in this report.

Worsening peak period congestion / peak hour spreading

Congestion can be defined as the reduction in the levels of services of a road as a consequence of traffic demand exceeding the capacity of the road. Put simply, as traffic flow levels approach the capacity of a section of road, speeds will fall and queues will develop. Congestion is now common throughout the entire conurbation, and recent studies suggest that the cost to the community in time lost and fuel used etc. is now approaching around £2 billion per year. The levels of congestion are greatest during the two peak periods but increasingly, congestion is becoming an issue on Saturday – particularly in and around major retail centres such as Solihull.

Evidence from congestion monitoring studies within the Borough confirms observations and anecdotal evidence about the extent of congestion within Solihull – particularly those adjacent to the town centre. The majority of roads adjacent to the Town Centre are congested with speed predominantly below 30 kph across most of them. Many sections show speeds of less than 15 kph during the critical peak hours. Warwick Road, Homer Road, Lode Lane, Hampton Lane and Poplar Road are particularly worthy of mention in this context.

The management of congestion is important to the Borough in two respects:

- To support the future development of the town centre in line with the aspirations of the Council and retain the role of Solihull as a sub-regional commercial and retail centre; and
- To meet the emerging targets for the 2005 West Midlands Local transport Plan to restrict the growth in traffic between 2004 and 2011 to 4%, and limit the growth in congestion levels to 5% during the same period.

Evidence from biennial traffic surveys conducted around the town centre cordon add further weight to the view that the highway network feeding the town centre is now close to capacity. Although flow levels during the actual morning and evening peak hours have fallen slightly in recent years, the reductions in traffic flow levels have been more than made up by increases in the shoulders of the peak, suggesting that more motorists are either consciously leaving home or work before or after the normal peak hour, to avoid the worst of the congestion. This phenomenon is called 'peak

spreading' and has been a feature of large centres across the country for many years. The fact that Solihull town centre is now experiencing similar patterns of peak spreading points to the scale of the congestion issues currently facing the Borough.

Increasing levels of traffic congestion is an inevitable consequence of the growth in traffic flows – particularly if no additional capacity can be provided to accommodate it. It therefore follows that only by somehow limiting or managing the growth in traffic flow levels, can the commensurate growth in congestion be held in check. This implies that an increase in the numbers of persons who can be encouraged to use alternative, more sustainable, modes of transport to travel into the Town Centre is not only desirable, but essential.

Bus accessibility

The Department for Transport (DfT) has made accessibility a keystone of its transport policy guidelines in a bid to encourage the location of new development within existing Town Centres at the expense of out-of-town locations. These policy directives are reinforced within the Regional Spatial Strategy, and the Solihull Unitary Development Plan. Accessibility is defined at its simplest level as the ability of people to travel to a given point within a defined period. In public transport terms, access to the system is determined by the location of bus stops and rail stations, and it follows therefore that 'accessibility' to a centre is heavily dependant on its proximity to stops and stations. For private vehicle travellers, accessibility is governed by the density and capacity of the road network, and the speed limits imposed upon it, and the availability of parking spaces.

Although public transport provision within Solihull is generally good, accessibility studies undertaken for the Transport Direction Paper (see **Appendix 1**) clearly indicate that accessibility to the town centre by car is around ten times greater than that for bus and train. In other words, around 11,500 people live within a 10 minute bus journey of the centre compared to 119,000 by car. Within the 30-minute travel isochrone these numbers increase to around 260,000 for public transport modes and 2,250,000 by car. In addition, the car profiles are much more concentric than the bus ones as cars are not restricted to fixed routes, and also benefit enormously from the proximity of the motorway network. The benefits of travel to work by car are

Part 5 – The Spatial Strategy

therefore clearly demonstrated in this exercise and further reinforce the reasons behind the growing number of cars on the Borough's roads, and the increases in congestion as a consequence.

A new Bus and Rail interchange for Solihull – Options for improving bus/rail integration with the Town Centre

There are two major bus hubs within Solihull town centre – the railway station and Station Road/Poplar Road with most services stopping at both hubs. As both of these hubs are located in the western half of the town centre, services to the east and south are not so common. Public transport passengers are thus faced with a relatively long walk, particularly so for rail passengers – this may act as a deterrent to the greater use of public transport within the centre in future if not addressed. The current bus hub on Poplar Road, although closer to the town centre, is not particularly attractive from the point of view of passengers. Poplar Road is a heavily trafficked route and is used as a means of access to the Town Centre car parks. Buses therefore have to share road space with other competing modes and passengers must cross the road to access the shops. The study has, therefore, considered a number of options to improve access to the Town Centre by public transport, which can be summarised as follows:

- Closing Poplar Road to all vehicles except buses. To make this feasible, access to the multi-storey car park (Marks and Spencer) within the Mell Square Shopping Centre must be moved to Warwick Road, and the owners of Mell Square have incorporated this feature into their plans for the redevelopment of the centre. Poplar Road can then be developed as a 'bus mall' which would significantly improve the environment for bus passengers.
- Developing and promoting more high quality bus services into the town centre. Solihull participates in a number of strategic bus improvement initiatives such as Bus Showcase and Red Routes, but the rate at which they are implemented must be increased to provide an attractive alternative to people attracted to the new facilities in the town centre should parking opportunities be limited.

- Improving the connectivity between the existing bus/rail hub and the town centre at the junction of Lode Lane, Station Road and Blossomfield Road.
- The provision of a new bus and rail interchange located closer to the town centre and the main shopping areas. It is envisaged that such a station could be located on Monkspath Hall Road adjacent to the existing long-stay car park which could be used as a park-and-ride facility for rail users in much the same way as the car park adjacent to the existing station. Although an engineering feasibility study is outside the scope of this report, our initial assessment of the opportunities available indicate that such a proposal is deliverable both in terms of the capacity of the site to accommodate a development of this nature and the site costs of doing so.
- The expansion of the town centre of Solihull may, therefore, act as the stimulus in improving the accessibility of the centre by bus and train by providing the impetus (and funds) to physically relocate the rail station to a point nearest to the centres of activity, and creating a new bus/rail interchange with a direct link into the town centre, improving bus frequencies and service penetration.
- It may be necessary for the Council to promote the development of a new bus/rail interchange at Monkspath Hall Road in order to deliver a 'step change' in the quality of public transport provision serving the town centre. Without such a move, as part of a balanced and integrated approach to improving accessibility to the town centre more generally, it is likely that car usage and congestion will continue to increase undermining the attractive of the town centre and acting as a constraint to its further development.
- The development of a new "bus mall" on Poplar Road and the relocation of Solihull bus and railway stations should not be seen as two mutually exclusive initiatives, but rather Phase 1 and Phase 2 of an integrated package of measures to improve public transport access to the town centre.

A lack of coherent pedestrian routes into the town centre

On a number of the strategic pedestrian routes into the town centre there are a number of points where the links are poor. These include access across Warwick Road and access from Blossomfield Road across the roundabout with Streetsbrook Road and Lode Lane. This will be a barrier for pedestrians walking into the town centre.

The role of the High Street / Poplar Road

Pedestrian facilities in the town centre are good with High Street and (much of) Mell Square being pedestrianised. This creates a safe vehicle free environment along with Touchwood for people to access facilities. High Street was pedestrianised in 1992; this has helped business on High Street, Mell Square and, from 2000, Touchwood to thrive.

In comparison Poplar Road is seen as unattractive for pedestrians due to the large numbers of vehicles with the busy entrance to Marks and Spencer's Car Park and the large number of bus stops along the road. This has discouraged retail business along this road is focussed largely on leisure business, for example, pubs and restaurants. As part of the interventions that have been proposed would be to move the entrance to the Marks and Spencer's Car Park to Warwick Road, this would enable Poplar Road to become a bus mall. This would create an attractive area for bus passengers and a safer environment for pedestrians.

Safety of vulnerable road users

The safety of vulnerable road users (includes pedestrians, cyclists and disabled users) is an important issue when studying the transport issues of Solihull Town Centre. Although, the town centre at the present is good for vulnerable road uses, it is the routes into the centre which are an issue. There are no fatal vehicle/ pedestrian accidents reported in the last five years, with the accidents causing predominately slight casualties. There were nine sites that were identified as accident blackspots, only two of these areas were identified as having more than one accident involving pedestrians. These were, Poplar Road where six of the sixteen accidents recorded involving pedestrians although after mitigation measures were undertaken in 2001 only 3 accidents have occurred. The other area identified was the B4102 and Union Road junction where three of the five reported

Part 5 – The Spatial Strategy

accidents in the last five years involved pedestrians. The high number of accidents involving pedestrians on Poplar Road are too be expected due to the number of pedestrians and vehicles that use the road.

The only other accident issue is on Homer Road at the junction with Touchwood Car Park where two serious accidents have occurred where cars have collided with cyclists in dark conditions. This junction should be reviewed for cyclist safety, to assess if there are any layout or visibility reasons for these accidents.

The number of accidents that occur is not the only safety issue that affects vulnerable road users, the fear of crime also influences the safety of these users. In Direction Paper No.5 (see Appendix 1) it can be seen that the study of where crimes against the person occur there is a focus on the High Street and around the bus stops on Poplar Road. This can deter people from travelling by bus after dark and can lead to a perceived sense of fear on Poplar Road.

The safety of all vulnerable road users is an important issue when considering the transport implications of any new developments in the Town Centre. These have been considered for each of the development options that have been studied.

Access for the mobility impaired

Solihull with its pedestrianised High Street and Touchwood has adequate facilities for the mobility impaired. Currently there are disabled (blue badge) car parking spaces in many of the town centre car parks. Mell Square has free parking for blue badge holders and is also the main location for Shopmobility in the town centre. This provides wheelchairs and other assistance to help the mobility impaired to get around Solihull with ease. Shopmobility also have a satellite facility in Touchwood this means that people accessing the Town Centre from Touchwood Car Park can use the facility.

The introduction of low floor ('showcase') buses means that there is now an increased accessibility for the mobility impaired to use public transport to travel into Solihull, therefore easing the reliance of the car.

Improved cycle connections

There are very few cycle facilities in Solihull town centre, with only one traffic free route into the town centre this is through Tudor Grange Park, and cycling from any other direction is, therefore limited to the main roads which are busy and unattractive to cyclists. A cycle link between the Rail Station along Blossomfield Road to the town centre which has been built due to demand highlighted in the Cycling Strategy, but this cycle link is actually on the footway, where cyclists should dismount and walk with their bikes. This creates a barrier to cycling into the town centre as it is perceived as unsafe to cycle on the main roads around the town centre. The inclusion of cycle lanes on roads into the town centre could encourage more people to cycle. Cycle parking is provided at Touchwood Car Park. This is in the form of Sheffield stands, to encourage commuters to cycle secure cycle parking should be provided, for example cycle lockers and employers should be encouraged to provide showers and changing facilities.

The need for a comprehensive parking strategy designed to deter long stay commuter parking and address issues of capacity and future supply

There are approximately 5,200 publicly available car parking spaces within the study area, the majority of which are managed by the Borough Council. In addition, there are likely to be a similar number of private, non-residential spaces (PNR) provided by employers within the town centre. Of these, around 1,050 are publicly available long-stay spaces which are primarily used by persons employed in the town centre. The remainder are mainly used by visitors to the town centre and shoppers.

An analysis of parking patterns for the public car parks clearly demonstrates that the available car parking stock is not fully utilised with around 30% of short-stay spaces available during the week, but little spare capacity in the long-stay stock. In comparison, the reverse trend is seen on Saturday with around 85% utilisation of the short-stay spaces, but only around 20% utilisation of the long stay spaces.

The opportunity exists, therefore, to utilise this spare capacity more efficiently and to rationalise the existing pattern of parking provision in the town centre and to provide replacement and additional car parking opportunities better related to the main shopping areas as the phased development of the town

proceeds. Table 5.1 provides a summary of likely future car parking requirements in the town centre.

Table 5.1: Summary of Future Car Parking Requirements for Solihull Town Centre

		Retail	Residential	Office	Total
Existing Spaces		4075	0	1979	6054
Phase 1 (5yrs) Mell Square	Existing spaces in Town Centre	4075	0	1979	6054
	New spaces required	333	240	0	573
	Total spaces in Town Centre	4408	240	1979	6627
Phase 2 (5yrs) Triangle & Lode Lane Sites	Existing spaces in Town Centre	3922	240	1779	5941
	New spaces required	0	450	0	450
	Total spaces in Town Centre	3922	690	1779	6391
Phase 3a (5yrs) Touchwood Expansion A	Existing spaces in Town Centre	3922	690	1431	6043
	New spaces required	533	0	348	881
	Total spaces in Town Centre	4455	690	1779	6924
Phase 3b (5yrs) Touchwood Expansion B	Existing spaces in Town Centre	3922	690	1605	6217
	New spaces required	967	0	348	1315
	Total spaces in Town Centre	4889	690	1953	7532
Phase 4	Existing spaces in Town Centre	5422	690	1953	8065
	New spaces required	128	580	0	708

Part 5 – The Spatial Strategy

		Retail	Residential	Office	Total
Monkspath, Morrisons & Station Site	Total spaces in Town Centre 2006 - 2011	5550	1270	1953	8773
Summary Total Spaces in Town Centre		Retail	Residential	Office	Total Spaces
All Developments		5550	1270	1953	8773

The role of park and ride

The study has looked in detail at a number of transport solutions to reduce the impact of the private car on the highway network. It is acknowledged, however, that many people rely on the private car for getting to work or to access services within the town centre as they may have poor or no access to alternative means of travel. For many of these trips, however, it may not be necessary to actually drive into the town centre – especially if parking charges are onerous to the individual or spaces not available. One option open to the Council is to develop a network of 'park and ride' sites around the town centre at strategic locations where motorists can park their cars at low cost and continue their journey by frequent bus or rail services. There are many examples within the Midlands and across the country where similar systems have been successfully introduced with perhaps the best known being in Oxford and Bath.

Taking regard of the patterns of traffic flow into the town centre, and the relationship between the town centre, its suburbs and the motorway network, there could be an opportunity to provide spaces for almost 2,000 vehicles should suitable sites be found. It is likely that bus-based park and ride is more appropriate than a rail-based alternative given that P&R opportunities at existing stations are very limited, and existing facilities are currently heavily used.

Developing a Movement and Transport Strategy for Solihull – Study Approach / Methodologies

The methodology for the estimation of parking provision and highways impact is set out in both the Transport Direction Paper ("Movement and Accessibility") (see **Appendix 1**). For each stage of the recommended masterplan, an estimate of the likely parking requirement and numbers of car trips was generated by means of a simple traffic model; which used current parking standards to establish a base case, modified by different levels of mode switch to alternative modes, and linked to a number of junction capacity models.

Basic junction modelling was completed on:

- Lode Lane/Warwick Road Roundabout;
- Warwick Road/New Road Signalised Junction;
- Lode Lane/Blossomfield Road/Streetsbrook Road Roundabout; and
- Monkspath Hall Road/ Princes Way Signalised Junction.

These models were then used to approximate the overall delay that would be caused if all of the identified development went ahead without any changes to the road network. Interventions were also determined for each of the four phases to ensure that traffic delays are kept to a minimum. The results from each option tested are discussed in Part 6 of this study.

Need for development of bespoke Solihull Town Centre Transport Model

During this study only four basic junction models were undertaken as described above, these junctions have been modelled to assess the delay at each junction caused by the proposed development options.

These four junction models do not give the full picture of the traffic delays caused by the proposed development options over the whole network. The junction models are stand alone models and have no ability to show how the delays from one junction affect the other junctions in area.

To gain an accurate picture of what congestion and delays the proposed development options will cause over the whole network, an area wide transport model is needed (for example a Saturn or micro simulation model).

An area wide model would include the need to obtain traffic counts at all the major junctions in the town centre and a study of the existing queues and delays. When built into a transport model with the extra trips from proposed developments it will give a more accurate picture of the routing and delays on the road network.

It is therefore essential to assessment of any more substantial development in Solihull that a bespoke town centre transport model be developed.

Strategy Objectives

The highway strategy has been developed in consultation with transport officers from Solihull MBC, taking into account schemes that are already approved. The strategy seeks to identify a number of objectives:

Mitigation of Traffic Impacts

Even though the transport strategy encourages more sustainable travel and encourages a diversion of traffic away from the town centre, there will inevitably be increases in traffic flow at certain times of the day and in certain locations. The highway strategy seeks to identify where and when improvement measures will be required to mitigate against all or part of these traffic impacts.

The detail of the improvement measures will subsequently need to be worked on as individual planning applications come forward. This can be managed through the preparation of Transport Assessments and the negotiation of section 106 and other agreements.

However, although a number of environmentally sensitive network improvements are likely to be possible, the road network in Solihull has a finite capacity. Highway infrastructure improvements of suitable size and scale will only partially resolve an identified problem, they will need to be accompanied with other mitigation measures, for example provision for alternative modes of transport.

Part 5 – The Spatial Strategy

Improving modal split

To reduce the increasing congestion on the roads surrounding Solihull, there is a need to encourage a greater modal split towards public transport and non-motorised modes of transport.

For any development later than phase two a modal split improvement of 10% would be needed to ensure that development traffic does not cause the congestion of the entire road network surrounding Solihull. The creation of a public transport interchange next to Monkspath Car Park on Princes Way, combining the proposed relocated rail station and a new bus station and the development of good quality walking and cycling links to the centre of town could assist in achieving this modal split target. Moving the rail station closer to the town centre and better information in the town centre about travelling to and from Solihull by train will encourage more people to travel into Solihull by train because it is quicker and more convenient than sitting in traffic trying to find a car parking space.

Improvements to existing public transport facilities including replacing broken bus stops, improving lighting and better timetable information should also be implemented to make public transport a more desirable mode of transport. The creation of a bus mall along Polar Road will also help to enhance the desirability of bus travel into the town centre.

Provision of Suitable Site Access

For any new development in Solihull the location of the car park and servicing accesses needs to be considered, as these should not be located where it would cause excess queuing on roads, or where it would compromise public transport and sustainable transport modes. An example of this is the Mell Square redevelopment, where the current access to Marks and Spencer's car park is unsuitable for the public transport interventions that have been suggested, therefore the access would need to be relocated to a suitable location.

Improvements for vulnerable Road Users

The highway strategy seeks to improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists by providing good facilities at the appropriate locations on links and

at junctions. Striking the right balance in terms of allocation of road space is important in Solihull.

The study has identified desirable links to the town centre where improvements should be made for pedestrians and cyclists. There is a need to create routes into the town centre that are safe and desirable for all vulnerable road users, this included pedestrians, cyclists and disabled people. The town centre itself has good facilities for pedestrians and the disabled, with the pedestrianised High Street, Mell Square and Touchwood. Although it should be ensured that there are dropped kerbs at all pedestrian crossing points in the centre and good lighting to give a sense of safety after dark.

Travel Plans

Travel plans should be produced for each new development in the Town Centre. A framework could be produced by Solihull MBC that each occupier will have to follow when completing their travel plan. The travel plans should include how the development is going to encourage more sustainable modes of transport, what incentives there are for staff to use public transport (for example details of company TravelWise) and what facilities companies are going to provide for pedestrians and cyclists.

Delivery Options (LTP / Planning Obligations and Conditions/ Other)

Depending on the final form which the master plan takes, the cost of infrastructure improvements required to deliver the full plan is expected to range from £5million to £15million, although it must be stressed that these figures are very broad estimates. Needless to say that it would be beyond the ability of the Borough to solely fund these improvements, and therefore a means of financing the improvements must be explored.

There are a number of funding sources which might be appropriate for delivering the redevelopment of the Town Centre including:

- Contributions from developers under Section 106 of the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act. They are legally binding obligations that are attached to a piece of land and are registered as local land charges against that piece of land. Planning obligations enable a council to

secure contributions to services, infrastructure and amenities in order to support and facilitate a proposed development. Contributions are negotiated with developers as part of the planning application process either for specific improvements or commuted against a basket of improvements along with those of other developers.

- As part of a clearly defined set of transport proposals to support the economy of the Borough, the Department for Transport will make funds available through the Local Transport Plan process. The Borough must submit a very comprehensive cost-benefit analysis by means of an 'Annex E' submission. The scheme must cost between £5million and £25million to qualify for financial support and must clearly demonstrate that a range of transport objectives have been met. There are numerous examples of Town Centre Transport Packages incorporating the provision of major public transport facilities, and both Walsall and Wolverhampton have secured funds (or promises of funds) to deliver similar schemes.
- Through the recently created Transport Innovation Fund (TIF). The Transport Innovation Fund represents a new approach by the Department for Transport ("DfT" or "the Department") to the allocation of some of its budget. Through the TIF, the DfT will be able to direct resources towards the achievement of two very high priority key objectives - specifically tackling congestion and improving productivity. The principle underlying the TIF is that resources should be allocated on the basis of an assessment of how these objectives can be most effectively and sustainably met. Given that this initiative is so new (January 2006), the actual process of securing funds is not well developed, but the terms of the initiative suggest that Solihull may well qualify under one or both of its key objectives.

Should the Council choose to move forward with our recommendations, there will be a requirement for it to vigorously pursue one or all of these potential funding sources alongside.


Part 5 – The Spatial Strategy

5.8 The Illustrative Masterplan

The accompanying illustrative masterplan (**Figure 5.6**) shows one way in which the built form of the future town centre could be physically configured, within an enhanced public realm of streets, routes and public spaces that provide and reinforce permeability, legibility and ease of pedestrian movement to and within the centre. It shows how:

- The short term development of Mell Square could accommodate more retail/commercial space with new residential above with a reconfigured civic space at its heart at the intersection of improved north-south and east-west pedestrian routes;
- The improved east-west route through Mell Square could connect to the future redevelopment of the Morrisons and Council car park site with retail, residential and multi-storey car parking arranged around a new civic space with positive frontages onto it as well as onto Warwick Road and George Road;
- The redevelopment of the Lode Lane and Station Road sites could extend the High Street, create a new, strong western gateway to the town centre, create a positive frontage onto Lode Lane, incorporate a new northern extension of Herbert Road, and integrate residential amenity space within the street blocks;
- Development to the south of Touchwood could provide an extension to the existing retail centre with a new north-south mall and new retail gateway between a pair of new office buildings fronting Homer Road;
- A new pedestrian route from the relocated station/interchange and the Monkspath car park to the above new retail gateway could be created along the landscaped boundary between two office block sites on Homer Road/Princes Way;
- A new east-west mall within the extended Touchwood centre could connect into the Library Square and into a further eastward extension of the retail centre onto the Council site;
- The redevelopment of the Council/parking site at the junction of Homer Road and Church Hill Road could create a new southern gateway to the town centre with retail/leisure at ground level fronting onto Golden Jubilee Gardens, residential above and access to the new residential and retail parking from the Homer road roundabout;
- The relocated station and new rail/bus/taxi interchange on the Monkspath car park site can be arranged around a new station square with new commercial development fronting onto it, and with access to new multi level parking for both rail and town centre users;
- New residential development on the western and southern parts of the Monkspath car park site could provide a strong frontage approach to the centre, with apartment blocks providing positive overlooking of Tudor Grange Park, and houses around an amenity open space relating to the scale and character of adjoining residential and community uses;
- New residential/mixed use development on the existing station car park site and around the existing station that reinforces the street, relates to existing residential and community uses and retains existing, visually significant tree stands; and
- Tree-planting and environmental enhancement of the principal routes and pedestrian links can significantly improve the appearance and perception of the town centre and the pedestrian experience within it.

The following section, Part 6 sets out how the strategy can be delivered through phasing of key developments up to 2021 and beyond.



**Part 6:
Delivery of the
Strategy -
Phasing**

Part 6 – Delivery of the Strategy – Phasing

6.1 Phasing

The overall Phasing Strategy for Solihull Town Centre is identified in **Figure 6.1**.

The future development of Solihull town centre as envisaged in this Study could be implemented in four phases. These are presented in 5 year blocks though clearly more detailed programming will be required as a next stage in taking the study forward. However, this section describes the sequence of development that could occur and how each component part could be secured. Some of the elements in the later phases are interdependent on the delivery of the later phases and some are not.

Many of the built development proposals will require the provision of new transport infrastructure. This section outlines when and how the infrastructure will be delivered. The strategy indicates where land assembly will be required, and the planning obligations that the Council should seek to support the proposed development. It should be noted that the planning obligations identified in the strategy are a likely minimum requirement of development and subject to development viability testing, Solihull MBC may wish to seek further developer contributions in relation to emerging planning proposals.

The Phasing Strategy has been developed having regard to the following important considerations:

- The need to ensure that the allocation and development of sites for retail, leisure and office development is phased so as to come forward broadly in line with regional and local assessments of capacity and need;
- The wish to avoid an over-supply of floorspace relative to market demand in order to maintain market and investment values;
- The timescales associated with the forward planning and provision of strategic public transport infrastructure to support development proposals;
- Statutory processes and the timescales for their completion (LDDs, LTP and land assembly etc);

- The complexity and nature of known development constraints and pre-conditions; and
- Differing organisational priorities and decision-making timescales.

The impacts of the four development phases are considered in the context of:

- Built development;
- Land assembly/delivery;
- Interdependency;
- Urban design principles;
- Transport infrastructure; and
- Planning obligations.

6.2 Phase 1 (5 year block)

Figure 6.2 shows a plan of Phase 1 development, an illustrative sketch and potential streetscape.

Built Development

The key development proposed under Phase 1 of the strategy, is the redevelopment and reconfiguration of Mell Square. Significant opportunities exist to remodel the shopping centre to provide improved accommodation and an enhanced range of retail and supporting A3, A4 and A5 uses together with new residential apartments above ground or at first floor level. The redevelopment of Mell Square should be undertaken in such a manner that it does not prejudice the longer term redevelopment of the adjoining Morrisons site or the creation of attractive pedestrian links between the two sites. Redeveloping and extending Mell Square could deliver the following outputs:

▪ Retail (including A3, A4 & A5)	10,000m2 (gross)
▪ Residential	240 units
▪ Replacement of existing decked car parks	

Land Assembly / Delivery

The redevelopment of Mell Square will be progressed by Morley Fund Management. Should the need arise for additional land to be assembled to enable the development to proceed, the Council will encourage this to take place by private agreement. However, if this is not practicable the Council

should consider use of CPO powers to bring forward development on the basis of achieving the proper planning of the area.

Interdependency

The development is not dependent on any other phases of development.

Urban Design Principles

New development at Mell Square will be expected to:

- Reinforce and improve the linkages and network of streets - in particular the pedestrian east west link from Poplar Road to Mell Square;
- Protect the north-south link from the High Street to Warwick Road along Drury Lane;
- Provide an improved central town square that is flexible and can be used for major events;
- Define strong, built-up frontages to each of the streets and pedestrian malls;
- Provide active frontages to all key streets;
- Ensure a high degree of transparency at ground and, where appropriate, first floor level;
- Contain no closed or passive units;
- Provide modern, mixed-use buildings;
- Respond to the visual prominence of different parts of the town centre with landmark/ marker elements;
- Create a high quality public realm, with robust design, good lighting and night time activity to encourage pedestrian activity; and
- Provide off street car parking in line with the strategy, either incorporated below ground or wrapped within the development block.

Movement and Transport Strategy Phase 1

Table 6.1 summarises the additional car parking and predicted overall delay to the road network in Solihull Town Centre for developments between 2006 and 2011.

Part 6 – Delivery of the Strategy – Phasing

Table 6.1: Summary of Phase 1 Development

Description	Car Parking Demand
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mell Square only 10,000 sq.m. Retail 240 Residential units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 569 spaces in Marks & Spencers car park 950 spaces in Mell Square car park
Cumulative Additional Traffic	Extra Parking Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AM peak + 102 trips (+0.8%) PM peak + 379 trips (+3.0%) Sat peak + 498 trips (+4.4%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 240 new residential spaces in basement 333 additional demand accommodated in extended Mell Square car parks
Delays	Interventions
Average delay per vehicle over 4 junctions = 12 seconds per vehicle (PM peak) 8 seconds per vehicle (Saturday)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poplar Road CP access closed and moved to Warwick Road New bus mall created in Poplar Road Early implementation of Bus Showcase Minor Traffic Management Changes to network

Network Improvements

There are a number of improvements to the road network that would need to be implemented to ensure that the additional trips associated with the development between 2006 and 2011. The delays predicted over the four junctions were 12 seconds per vehicle during the PM peak and 8 seconds per vehicle during the Saturday peak.

The network would need minor improvements to accommodate the additional traffic from the Mell Square development, this would include signal timing changes to signal controlled junctions including Warwick Road/New Road and the signalised roundabout at Lode Lane/ Blossomfield Road.

Public transport improvements

The development of a bus mall along Poplar Road would create an attractive route for public transport allowing buses to travel freely without delay from other vehicles. Other public transport initiatives for example bus showcase

should start to be implemented to achieve the most potential from existing public transport routes.

Walking and cycling

The enhancements to Mell Square would include good pedestrian links through the development and from Warwick Road to High Street. Cycle parking could also be provided as part of the Mell Square development this would help encourage cycling into the Town Centre. The provision of a bus mall along Poplar Road and the associated improvements would create a safer environment for pedestrians in the area along Poplar Road and Station Road, especially after dark.

Parking Strategy

There are two car parks in Mell Square, the extension of this site would require an additional 573 spaces, 240 of these should be provided within the residential developments for sole use of the residents. The other 333 spaces should be provided in the redeveloped Mell Square Car Park.

As stated in paragraph 2.4.2 one of the interventions suggested is to make Poplar Road into a bus mall. This will create a more desirable environment for bus passengers and will make the area more attractive to businesses on Poplar Road. To achieve the bus mall the Marks and Spencer's Car Park entrance will need to be relocated during the redevelopment of Mell Square. The most suitable location for the new car park access would be on Warwick Road, this would eliminate the need for the majority of traffic to travel along Poplar Road.

6.3 Phase 2 (5 year block)

Figure 6.3 shows a plan of Phase 2 development, an illustrative sketch of what the development and streetscape could look like.

Built development

Two developments comprise Phase 2. The opportunity exists to extend the urban character of the High Street westward along Lode Lane to create an improved western gateway to the town centre. The redevelopment of the Dominion Court car park and surrounding area provides the potential for a

high density mixed-use development with retail and offices at ground floor and residential (apartments in 4 storey blocks) above.

This could yield the following amount of floor space:

Commercial (retail/office)	2500m2 (gross)
Residential	165 units
Car parking at basement level	

A further opportunity exists along Station Road / Lode Lane to promote the redevelopment of existing land uses (including Lode Lane car park) to deliver a high quality mixed use development incorporating retail, restaurant and offices at ground floor and residential uses (apartments in 3/6 storey blocks) above. This could provide the following:

Commercial (retail/restaurant/office)	2600m2 (gross)
Residential	285 units
Car parking at basement level	

Land Assembly / Delivery

The redevelopment of these two sites will be developer led. In view of the ownership patterns in the area the Council may be required to use its CPO powers to facilitate comprehensive development.

Interdependency

These developments are not dependent on any other phases of development and could conceivably come forward as part of Phase 1. However, given the potential need for the Council to use its land assembly powers and the associated timescales involved, it is considered that the development of these sites is unlikely to occur until after 2011 at the earliest.

Movement and Transport Strategy Phase 2

Table 6.2 summarises the additional car parking and predicted overall delay associated with the developments between 2011 and 2016.

Table 6.2: Summary of Phase 2 Development

Description	Car Parking Demand
Triangle and Lode Lane sites	200 spaces (Dominion Court)

Part 6 – Delivery of the Strategy – Phasing

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5,100 sq.m Commercial 450 Residential units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 486 spaces (Lode Lane) Both car parks closed total –686 spaces
Cumulative Additional Traffic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AM peak + 273 trips (+2.3%) PM peak + 424 trips (+3.3%) Sat peak + 606 trips (+5.3%) 	Extra Parking Requirements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 450 new residential spaces in basement 170 spaces commercial to be located within existing Town Centre car parks with demand from closed car park. NB – All spare capacity now utilised
Delays <p>Average delay per vehicle over 4 junctions = 16 seconds per vehicle (PM peak) 6 seconds per vehicle (Saturday)</p>	Interventions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> VMS signing and parking management Further bus service upgrades (showcase) Bus park-and-ride? Further minor junction upgrades (signal timings etc)

Network Improvements

The road network in Solihull Town Centre would be able to accommodate the extra trips associated with this phase of the development with only minor improvements to the network. Minor alterations to the signal timings on the main junctions in the Town Centre will accommodate the extra trips.

Public transport improvements

The improvements to public transport could include further implementation of bus service and route upgrades, for example showcase. Consideration should also be given to the role that a park and ride facility just outside the Town Centre, with bus services into the centre might play in improving public transport access to the town centre.

Walking and cycling

There are no specific walking and cycling infrastructure recommendations other than to ensure that the new development has good pedestrian links through them and that there is safe access across Lode Lane to access the Lode Lane site. There should also be space provided as part of the residential developments for cycle parking.

Travel Plans

Travel plans should be produced for each new development in the town centre, a framework could be produced by Solihull MBC that each occupier will have to follow when completing their travel plan. The travel plans should include how the development is going to encourage more sustainable modes of transport, what incentives there are for staff to use public transport (for example details of company TravelWise) and what facilities companies are going to provide for pedestrians and cyclists.

Parking Strategy

This phase in the development will remove two of the Town Centre car parks, Lode Lane and Dominion Court, although Lode Lane is not usually 100% full the 200 spaces that are available on a weekend at Dominion Court are full. This strategy assumes that the parking from these car parks will be relocated in the spare capacity at Monkspath and the other Town Centre car parks.

The development will also require the need for 620 new parking spaces. 450 of these spaces will be accommodated within the residential units. The other 170 will need to be accommodated on the sites or within Monkspath Car Park.

At this stage consideration should be given to the implementation of a VMS system to guide vehicles to car parks that have spare capacity. This will reduce queuing at car park entrances (especially Touchwood).

With the redistribution of the parking from Lode Lane and Dominion Court car parks there is now no spare parking capacity in the Town Centre.

Urban Design Principles

The new mixed-use development should be expected to:

- Provide strong frontages and active ground floor uses along Station Road;
- Provide a landmark/gateway frontage to Lode Lane and the roundabout;
- Provide a new urban living quarter with residential uses above commercial units;

- Provide internal courtyards and garden spaces within new development as amenity space for residents;
- Allow for a new bus only link along Station Road;
- Provide improved pedestrian and cycle connections from the Town Centre;
- Create a high quality public realm with robust design, good lighting and appropriate night time activity to encourage pedestrian activity. The introduction of street trees and pavement seating is particularly encouraged; and
- Provide off street car parking in line with guidance, either incorporated below ground or within a development block.

6.4 Phase 3 (5 year block)

Figure 6.4 shows a plan of Phase 3 development, an illustrative sketch of what the development and streetscape could look like.

Built Development

Following the completion of the Mell Square redevelopment, the future expansion of Touchwood represents in planning and market terms the most appropriate location for accommodating additional large scale retail comparison goods floor space in the town centre.

Subject to market demand and capacity considerations it is anticipated that development could proceed in two tranches, notated 3A and 3B.

Phase 3A

Scope exists to take advantage of the possible relocation of Solihull Police Station and Magistrates Court to provide additional retail and office floorspace, with a strong frontage to Homer Road. The amount of commercial floor space achievable on the site will be dependent on whether the Council decides to retain or redevelop the existing library and theatre complex. For the purposes of this strategy we have assumed that the site remains in civil, cultural and community use, either in its current form or following redevelopment, to provide new and enhanced facilities.

The approximate levels of floorspace that could be achieved during Phase 3A are:

Part 6 – Delivery of the Strategy – Phasing

▪ Retail	16,000m ² (gross)
▪ Office	8,000m ² (gross)
▪ Cultural / Community	10,000m ² (gross)
▪ Car parking at ground floor/basement level	

Land Assembly / Delivery

The implementation of this Phase of development is dependent on the assembly of third party land and the decisions made by the Police and Magistrates Courts as to the nature of their continued presence in the Solihull town centre and the timing of any future relocation. The timing of the site's redevelopment will also be contingent on any decisions made by the Council in relation to its service delivery and estates strategies and, in particular, the scale and nature of its own property requirements within the town centre. Any delay in arriving at a decision on these matters will have an impact on the timescales for the implementation of Phase 3A and the form of any future development. Assuming early agreement with the Police and Magistrates Court on their relocation, a planning application for the development of the site could be submitted during Phase 2. This would allow for the completion of the scheme during the early part of Phase 3, providing space to accommodate any Council services that would be affected by the implementation of Phase 3B.

Interdependencies

The realisation of Phase 3A is totally dependent on the decision of the Police and Magistrates Court to relocate, which it is understood could take place in the 2012/14 period.

Phase 3B

As part of a second phase of development the opportunity exists to further extend Touchwood through the redevelopment of Solihull Council House and surrounding local authority offices. This would allow for an additional western extension of the retail core area and the creation of a new high quality southern gateway and edge to the town centre. The precise configuration of the additional retail floorspace will be developer led and will need to reflect market considerations as they exist at the time of the schemes development. However it is clear that the Council will expect the scheme to make provision for the accommodation of a diverse range of retail, leisure and restaurant

uses, and should it be required, new civic accommodation to accommodate and facilitate the Council's role in community leadership. The implementation of Phase 3B, assuming a 2/3-storey development could yield the following amount of floorspace:

▪ Retail (including A3, A4 & A5 uses)	29,000m ² (gross)
▪ Commercial Offices	8,000m ² (gross)
▪ Car Parking at ground floor / basement levels	

Depending on market conditions, the development of the southern part of the site for residential uses might be considered as an appropriate alternative use to office development. Adopting this form of development could provide up to 150 apartments.

Land Assembly / Delivery

The majority of the land required for this phase of development is in the ownership of Solihull MBC.

Interdependency

Critical to securing the development of this area for new retail, office and/or residential uses is the need for the Council to relocate from its existing civic buildings to provide a site for development. In order to achieve this the Council is recommended to:

- Undertake an early review of its own service delivery strategies and implications for future local authority estate;
- Develop an Estates and Property Strategy which identifies the opportunities for delivering replacement civic accommodation within Solihull town centre or elsewhere in the Borough; and
- Consider the scope to provide new Council accommodation through, inter alia, an agreement with a developer to provide replacement civic accommodation prior to the redevelopment of the existing Council buildings.

There is limited availability of sites within Solihull town centre to accommodate further large scale office development. The current Council

offices amount to around 12,000m² (gross) in floorspace. In the context of this study, there are potentially three main options available to the Council if it should resolve to support the Phase 3B redevelopment scheme on the current Council owned estate:

- The authority could vacate its offices and find alternative provision elsewhere in the town centre. However, this is seen as unlikely given the absence of available office premises and the costs of relocation to less suitable accommodation.
- The Council could relocate to new purpose built offices built as part of Phase 3A development. This could facilitate more effective redevelopment of the existing Council estate. Sale of the land would fund the relocation costs.
- The final option could involve the development of Phase 3B providing new (smaller) purpose built offices for the Council to allow relocation of services at a first stage of the scheme. This proposal could, however, prove difficult to manage in terms of the construction and relocation programme.

Of the three options, option (ii) would appear the most deliverable, but will require further detailed valuation (including a masterplan) to assess the appropriate configuration, scale, phasing and costs of potential development. This analysis would inform future discussions with a developer over procurement scenarios.

We have also considered the possible relocation of the Council offices onto the Monkspath Hall Road car parks. However it is likely that large-scale office development on this site in addition to a new public transport interchange would require major junction improvements at Monkspath Hall/Princes Way.

It is likely that any further major expansion to Touchwood (beyond that envisaged under Phase 3A) will need to be accompanied by efforts to achieve a modal shift of 10% towards public transport and non-motorised modes of travel. This will be required to relieve the impacts of increased traffic congestion on the road network generated by further retail development. Although it may be possible to secure the necessary

Part 6 – Delivery of the Strategy – Phasing

improvements to modal split through the implementation of a range of demand management measures, the Council should give consideration to examining the potential contribution that the development of a new bus/rail interchange on the Monkspath Hall Road carpark can play in meeting this objective.

If a need is identified for the development of a new bus/rail interchange to support the future development of the town centre it should be implemented either prior to or in parallel with the development of Phase 3B.

Although we would expect a significant developer contribution towards the cost of relocating the bus and railway station, the potential exists to promote the scheme through the West Midlands Local Transport Plan (LTP) process. In view of the timescales involved in taking forward new proposals through the LTP process, an early decision by the Council supporting the principle of moving the Bus and Railway stations will be required if it is to proceed in tandem with any further expansion of Touchwood. Further discussions will also be required with Network Rail and Centro to gain their commitment to this priority project.

Monkspath Hall Road Car Park

Built Development

The redevelopment of part of the Monkspath Hall Road car park to accommodate a new bus and railway station to serve the town centre represents a significant opportunity to improve Solihull's accessibility by public transport. The reconfiguration of the existing surface car parks into decked parking will allow for the development of a new high quality public transport interchange and the introduction of residential apartments in 2 – 4 storey blocks. This would help provide capital funding and assist in creating a more attractive development. This would allow for the development of the following:

- New Bus and Rail public transport interchange.
- Residential 375 units.
- Decked car parking

Land Assembly / Delivery

It is possible that no third party land assembly will be required in relation to this phase of development, however this will require investigation by the Council to confirm the position. The development of the new public transport interchange would be taken forward by Network Rail, national rail operators and Centro with funding provided from a variety of sources including developer contributions and the West Midlands LTP. The residential component of the overall scheme will be developer led.

The relocation and development of the public transport interchange (and associated car parking) may need to be brought forward in Phase 3 to support the development of Touchwood Phases 3A and 3B. Due to the phasing of construction activity associated with the public transport interchange and car parking, it is anticipated that residential development on site might not start until the beginning of Phase 4 at the earliest.

Interdependencies

In the absence of LTP funding support, securing the development of a new public transport interchange in this location will be dependent on the granting of permission for additional major retail development referred to under Phases 3A and 3B. This is due to the substantial funding required for developing the new public transport interchange and providing a direct link with Touchwood and the town centre that will be sought as a private sector funded scheme secured by a S106 contribution linked to further retail development at Touchwood.

Movement and Transport Strategy Phase 3 (Extension A and B)

The following three tables (Table 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5) summarise the additional car parking that will be needed and predicted overall delay that will be caused from the trip increases.

Table 6.3: Summary of Phase 3 Development - Touchwood Expansion A

Description	Existing Car Parking at Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Touchwood Expansion A ▪ 16,000 sq.m. Retail ▪ 8,000 sq.m. Commercial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Existing library and Police Station and Magistrates court. Approx. 348 spaces
Cumulative Additional Traffic	Extra Parking Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ AM peak + 370 trips (+2.9%) ▪ PM peak + 973 trips (+7.7%) ▪ Sat peak + 1230 trips (+10.9%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 533 spaces retail ▪ Inc replacement of existing spaces within development site
Interventions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Possible signalisation of Lode Lane/Warwick Road roundabout ▪ Further minor junction upgrades (signal timings etc) ▪ Park and Ride implementation ▪ Further 'Showcase' and 'Red Routes' bus improvements 	

Table 6.4: Summary of Phase 3 Development (2016-2021) Touchwood Expansion B

Description	Existing Car Parking development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Touchwood Expansion B ▪ 29,000 sq.m. Retail ▪ 8,000 sq.m. Commercial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 174 spaces council house
Cumulative Additional Traffic	Extra Parking Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ AM peak + 599 trips (+4.7%) ▪ PM peak + 1539 trips (+12.2%) ▪ Sat peak + 1882 trips (+16.6%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1,315 spaces to be provided ▪ Inc replacement of 174 Council House spaces
Interventions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Possible signalisation of Lode Lane/Warwick Road roundabout ▪ Further minor junction upgrades (signal timings etc) ▪ Park and Ride implementation ▪ Further 'Showcase' and 'Red Routes' bus improvements 	

Part 6 – Delivery of the Strategy – Phasing

Table 6.5: Summary of Phase 3 Development - Touchwood Expansion A and B

Description	Existing Car Parking at Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Touchwood Expansion A and B With Railway Station 45,000 sq.m. Retail 16,000 sq.m. Commercial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing library and Police Station and magistrates Court. Approx, 348 spaces. These to be replaced by commercial spaces. 174 spaces council house
Additional Traffic	New Additional Parking Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AM peak + 696 trips (+5.8%) PM peak + 2088 trips (+16.5%) Sat peak + 2506 trips (+22.1%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1,847 spaces to be provided Inc 288 additional spaces in Monkspath Inc replacement of 174 Council House spaces and 348 Library and commercial spaces.
Delays	Interventions
Average delay per vehicle over 4 junctions = 134 seconds per vehicle (PM peak) 58 seconds per vehicle (Saturday)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Railway Station relocated New Bus interchange Further minor junction upgrades (signal timings etc)

Network Improvements

The development of Touchwood in Phase 3 has been assessed using three different scenarios, these are Touchwood Expansion 3A (Police Station, Magistrates Court and Library), Touchwood Expansion 3B (Council House) and both 3A and 3B together.

Touchwood Expansion 3A includes retail and commercial development on the Police Station, Magistrates Court and Library site. We believe that the Phase 3A expansion can be achieved without moving the railway station if a number of other public transport initiatives are in place, including development of Park and Ride, development of Bus Showcase and Red Routes. The junction of Lode Lane and Warwick Road at this stage is congested and the option of signalling the roundabout should be considered.

Touchwood Expansion 3B includes retail and commercial development on the Council House and car park site. If this was developed without

Touchwood Expansion 3A there would be increased congestion on the network around Solihull and this would require the initiatives as identified for Expansion 3A to be implemented. It is possible that Phase 3B can also be achieved without the railway station being moved. However, this will be dependent on the implementation of demand management measures to achieve the desired modal split improvements.

Table 6.5 shows the delay over the network if the railway station is moved, it would be expected that this delay would increase further if the railway station is not moved which would cause major delays and queues at the four junctions modelled and around the Town Centre.

Before the implementation of Phase 3, we strongly recommend that a bespoke traffic model is developed to test the various development scenarios in both Phase 3 and Phase 4, as the scale of the development now proposed, exceeds the network impact capability of the parking model.

Public transport improvements

The junctions have been modelled to assume that there is going to be a 10% modal shift towards public transport. The recommendation to move the railway station from its existing to location to near Monkspath and Princes Way and a new bus interchange could be implemented during this stage to help achieve the 10% modal split improvement.

Walking and cycling

Phase 3 (2016 to 2021) includes the extension of Touchwood, included in the Touchwood extension should be the development of good pedestrian routes from the proposed new railway station and bus station. Each development should ensure that it is designed to be desirable to pedestrians.

Travel Plans

Travel plans should be produced for each new development in the Town Centre. A framework could be produced by Solihull MBC that each occupier will have to follow when completing their travel plan. The travel plans should include how the development is going to encourage more sustainable modes of transport, what incentives there are for staff to use public transport (for example details of company TravelWise) and what facilities companies are going to provide for pedestrians and cyclists.

Parking Strategy

The two options for the Touchwood extension would create a need for different numbers of car parking spaces. Touchwood Expansion 3A would require an additional 533 spaces and Touchwood Expansion 3B would require 1315 spaces, this would also replace the 173 space car park at the existing Council House. If the railway station is moved, the existing car park at the station will need to be accommodated next to the new station. This would require an additional 288 spaces to be provided at Monkspath.

6.5 Phase 4 (5 year block)

Figure 6.5 shows a plan of Phase 4 development, an illustrative sketch of what the development and streetscape would look like.

Built Development

A number of separate developments comprise Phase 4 of the Strategy.

Station Quarter Site

The potential relocation of the bus and railway stations would release a major development opportunity for residential and or commercial activity to the north of the town centre. Assuming the relocation of the existing uses to Monkspath Hall Road the opportunity arises to provide the following floorspace:

- Residential 100 units; or
- Commercial Offices/Residential 5,800 m² (gross)/20 Units
- Car parking at basement level

Land Assembly / Delivery

The development of this site will be taken forward by the existing owner in accordance with the provisions of a Development Agreement with the Council relating to the appropriate development of Monkspath Hall Road car parks for a new public transport interchange.

Interdependency

The redevelopment of this site for residential or commercial uses is entirely dependent on the prior relocation of the existing bus and rail station facilities.

Part 6 – Delivery of the Strategy – Phasing

Urban Design Principles

The new mixed use development on the former station and station car park site will be expected to:

- Provide a frontage onto Station Approach whilst respecting the existing trees;
- Provide internal courtyards and garden spaces within new development as amenity space for residents;
- Provide improved pedestrian and cycle connections to the Town Centre; and
- Provide off street car parking in line with guidance, either incorporated below ground or within a development block.

Planning Obligations

Through the development of this area the Council would seek to secure through Section 106 and 278 Agreements:

- Affordable Housing;
- Private sector contributions towards educational, health and public open space needs as appropriate; and
- Public realm enhancements.

Morrisons/Eastern Gateway Site

The redevelopment of this site, which includes the existing Morrisons supermarket and Council multi-storey car, would have significant benefits in both urban design and townscape terms. However, this is viewed as being a long-term development opportunity only. This reflects the desirability in planning terms of maintaining Morrisons continued presence in the town centre but also the limited commercial incentives to the operator to replace the existing surface level car parking with more costly decked car parking as would be required in order to release this land for further development. In addition the existing store format appears commercially successful, so there would have to be a scheme put forward that would be commercially attractive to Morrisons. An ageing store format and/or condition of the premises would potentially drive this issue. Hence this opportunity is viewed as longer term.

However, should this situation change in the future, potential exists in physical terms for the site's redevelopment to accommodate additional retail floorspace with residential development above in the form of 3 storey blocks.

This could provide:

▪ Retail (new Morrisons Store)	5,500 m2 (gross)
▪ Retail	3,850 m2 (gross)
▪ Residential	105 units
▪ Car parking at surface and basement levels	

Land Assembly/Delivery

The scale, nature and timing of this sites redevelopment will be dependent on issues of commercial viability. Any scheme for the site's development will need to demonstrate a clear incentive for Morrison's to reconsider the nature and form of their presence on site.

Interdependency

The development of this site is not dependent on any other phases of development. However the reconfiguration and redevelopment of Mell Square should not preclude its proper integration with rest of the town centre.

Urban Design Principles

The new mixed use development on the Morrisons site will be expected to:

- Connect through to the new Mell Square;
- Provide strong frontages and active ground floor uses around a new public space;
- Provide a landmark/gateway frontage to Warwick Road; and
- Provide a new urban living quarter with residential uses above retail.

Planning Obligations

Through the development of this area the Council would seek to secure through Section 106 and 278 Agreements:

- Affordable Housing;
- Private sector contributions towards educational, health and open space requirements, as appropriate; and
- Public realm enhancements.

Monkspath Hall Road Car Park

Built Development

The part redevelopment of this site for a new bus and rail interchange (together with new car parking facilities) has already been identified as a key component part of Phase 3. Potential also exists to accommodate residential and/or further commercial office development on the site. Under the Phase 3 Development Scenario we have identified the capacity of the site deliver 375 residential apartments in addition to the proposed public transport interchange. As an alternative development option we consider that the site has the physical capacity to accommodate alongside the previously identified transport infrastructure the following scale of development:

▪ Residential	220 units
▪ Commercial Office	11,000m2 (gross)
▪ Decked / basement level car parking	

Land Assembly/Delivery

The non-transport related development of the site will be taken forward by a private sector developer. Third party land may be required to facilitate major junction improvements outside the boundary of the site. The Council is advised to investigate the position here.

Interdependencies

The development of the site for the mix of uses identified above is subject to the same development pre-conditions identified above under Phase 3.

Planning Obligations

Through the development of the area, the Council would seek to secure through Section 106 and 278 Agreements:

- Revised Bus Routings;

Part 6 – Delivery of the Strategy – Phasing

- Junction Improvements at Lode Lane/ Station Road, Princes Way / Monkspath Hall Road, Lode Lane / Warwick Road;
- Affordable Housing;
- Private sector contributions towards educational, health and open space needs, as appropriate;
- Public Realm enhancements; and
- Cycle parking facilities.

Movement and Transport Strategy Phase 4

Table 6.6 summarises the additional car parking spaces and predicted total delay for development post 2021.

Table 6.6: Summary of Phase 4 Development

Description	Existing Car Parking at Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ With railway station ▪ 3,850 sq.m. Retail (Morrisons) ▪ 580 Residential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 350 spaces Morrisons ▪ 1043 Monkspath Hall Car Park
Additional Traffic	New Additional Parking Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ AM peak + 818 trips (+6.4%) ▪ PM peak + 2308 trips (+18.3%) ▪ Sat peak + 2815 trips (+24.9%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 100 Residential spaces at the Station Site ▪ 105 Residential spaces at the Morrisons Site ▪ 375 Residential spaces at the Monkspath Hall Site ▪ 128 additional Retail at the Morrisons Site
Delays	Interventions
Average delay per vehicle over 4 junctions = 180 seconds per vehicle (PM peak) 61 seconds per vehicle (Saturday)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Railway Station relocated ▪ New Bus interchange ▪ Revised Bus routings ▪ Junction improvements at Lode Lane/Station Road, Princes Way/MHR, Lode Lane/Warwick Road. ▪ Development of Town Centre Traffic Model

Network Improvements

To achieve any of the development outlined in this report in Solihull Town Centre post 2021, there would need to be some major junction

improvements. It is predicted that the increased traffic would cause significant delay at:

- Lode Lane/Warwick road roundabout (if no improvements are made) with predicted queues of approximately 247 on Lode Lane south during the Saturday peak;
- Lode Lane/Blossomfield Road/Streetsbrook Road roundabout during the Saturday peak (especially on Station Road) with predicted queues of 20 Streetsbrook Road (with signal optimisation);
- Monkspath Hall Road/Princes Way Signals with predicted average queues of 43 vehicles on Princes Road (with signal optimisation);
- Warwick Road/New Road signals with predicted average queues of 75 vehicles on Warwick Road (with signal optimisation).

There would also be a need for improvements to the other junctions around the Town Centre.

For the purposes of this assessment we have examined the transport impacts of promoting residential development on the Monkspath Hall Road car parks in addition to that of the new bus and railway interchange provided as part of Phase 3. As an alternative to residential development it would be possible to consider the sites development for a mix of residential and commercial office development.

However, this would produce additional traffic flows to and from the development and this would require major junction improvements at the Monkspath Hall Road/Princes Way signals. This would be difficult to deliver due to constraints at the junction, including the width of the available space at the junction for carriageway widening, especially on Monkspath Hall Road at the railway bridge.

Public transport improvements

There will need to be a continued development of the bus and rail timetables to meet the demand of the new developments within the Town Centre. There is great potential for better public transport connections with the development of a bus interchange next to the proposed railway station. This would create

a good link between bus and train and with both modes and the Town Centre.

Walking and cycling

There are no specific infrastructure proposals for walking and cycling post 2021 except to ensure that any development that includes residential provides space for cycle parking, and that the all new development has good quality pedestrian links to local amenities and the Town Centre.

Parking Strategy

There would need to be an additional of 1053 spaces for the development outlined for post 2021. This car parking would be located on the three sites, with 100 spaces being located at the existing railway site for the residential development, 233 additional spaces on the Morrison's site (105 of which should be located in the residential developments) and 720 additional spaces at Monkspath. This would increase the parking needed at Monkspath to 2021 spaces, to achieve this, a multi storey car park would need to be built.

The development post 2021 would take the total number of car parking spaces needed in the Town Centre to 8938 spaces. This total does not include any private non residential parking other than the spaces that will need to be provided for the new developments.

The following section, Part 7, identifies the planning policy framework for delivery of the strategy.

**Part 7:
Delivering the
Strategy – The
Planning Policy
Framework**

Part 7 – Delivery of the Strategy – The Planning Policy Framework

7.1 Process – General Considerations

Previous sections have reviewed the conclusions of the urban design, transportation, property market and town centre policy assessments undertaken as part of this study. They have also recommended a “Spatial Vision” and a set of “Strategic Objectives” that the Council may wish to adopt when developing its spatial planning policy framework for Solihull town centre, and the other centres in the Borough. Moreover, they have suggested how phased development of key town centre opportunity sites may proceed and how that would maintain and enhance the role of Solihull town centre as a retail centre, and diversify the range of uses present.

This section considers the process that the Local Planning Authority will need to follow to enable the Spatial Vision, Strategic Objectives and potential development opportunities to enable it to be incorporated into the Local Development Framework guiding the development of Solihull town centre and the wider network of centres. It does so in the context of four important considerations; namely:-

- The procedural requirements set out in PPS12 in relation to the preparation of statutory (and non-statutory) spatial planning documents;
- The requirements of PPS6 in relation to the scope and content of development plan documents (DPDs) relating to town centres;
- The scope and status of this Study in the light of the requirements of PPS6 and PPS12 and the extent to which it may be used to inform and support the preparation of statutory spatial planning policy; and
- The timing of the review of the Regional Spatial Strategy and the implications of that for the timing of the preparation by Solihull MBC of local development documents.

7.2 The Requirements of PPS12

PPS12 explains the process that must be followed when preparing local development documents. Proper application of the advice in PPS12 is essential if DPDs are to be considered “sound” following examination. The tests of soundness are organised into three categories; “Procedural”, “Conformity” and “Coherence, Consistency and Effectiveness”.

Key to the Procedural tests are the principles of community involvement and “front-loading” whereby the community should be involved at an early stage in the preparation of local development documents to “... *achieve local ownership and legitimacy for the policies that will shape the future distribution of land uses and development in an authority’s area*” (para 3.2). Moreover, para 4.2 says that LPAs should “*front load the preparation of development plan documents by facilitating early involvement and securing inputs from the community and all stakeholders*”.

A further procedural test is whether the plan and its policies have been subject to sustainability appraisal with that process being required to appraise the social, environmental and economic effects of the strategies and policies in a local development document “*from the outset of the preparation process*”. (Further advice on the application of sustainability appraisal is provided in Section 4.2).

The Conformity tests include the need for a development plan document to be consistent with national planning policy, to be in general conformity with the RSS and to have regard to any other relevant plans, policies and strategies relating to the area or adjoining areas.

The ‘Coherence, Consistency and Effectiveness’ tests include a requirement that the policies of the plan are founded on a robust and credible evidence base. Policies must be based on a “*thorough understanding of the needs of their area...*” (para 4.8) and the evidence base is “*critical to the preparation of local development documents...*” (para 4.9). Moreover, it is important that the plan has tested spatial development options with front loading including the consideration of “*all the alternative options derived from the development of the evidence base ...*” (para 4.2) and the Preferred Options and Submitted Policies representing the most appropriate in all the circumstances “*having considered the relevant alternatives...*”.

The local planning authority will need to decide whether to promote its policies and proposals for its centres within an Action Area Plan (AAP) for Solihull town centre, or within a “Centres DPD” which could cover all centres and pick up detailed matters that are not appropriate for inclusion in the Core Strategy DPD.

It may also decide to make use of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) which are not subject to independent examination (and are not therefore required to meet the soundness tests) but “*should be subjected to rigorous procedures of community involvement*”. SPD may be used to expand or support policy in a development plan document but must not be used to allocate land.

7.3 The Requirements of PPS6

The Retail Policy Direction Paper (see **Appendix 1**) reviewed the requirements placed on regional planning bodies and local planning authorities by PPS6: Planning for Town Centres and concluded that the RSS Review is likely to incorporate a suite of “centres” policies which will set the context and framework for local development documents and is likely to include:-

- The strategic framework for the development of the regional network of centres;
- The strategy for growth of higher order centres and framework for planning at the local level;
- Guidance on those centres of regional and sub-regional significance where growth should be encouraged;
- Assessment of the overall need for comparison retail, leisure and office floorspace over the RSS period; and
- Identification of where needs should be met “having regard to capacity, accessibility of centres and regeneration needs”.

PPS6 encourages local planning authorities to put in place policies in their local development documents which:-

- Set out the hierarchy of centres in the Borough, and their roles;
- Articulate the spatial vision and strategy for the hierarchy of centres;
- Include guidance on the quantitative and qualitative need for new floorspace for main town centre uses;
- Define the PSA and town centre boundaries including any extensions to those needed to accommodate growth;
- Identify and allocate sites to meet needs for at least the first five years from the adoption of the DPD; and

Part 7 – Delivery of the Strategy – The Planning Policy Framework

- Set out criteria based policies for assessing new development including on sites not allocated.

Clearly the policies in local development documents will be informed by, and must be in general conformity with, the RSS. This has implications for the timing of the preparation of local development documents generally, and in Solihull in particular, given the timetable for the preparation of the RSS Stage 2 Review (see below).

PPS6 is clear also that local planning authorities should commission their own needs assessment (para 2.32) which *“should be carried out as part of the plan preparation and review process ...”*. This should be in addition to any regional need assessment. This advice applies to retail, leisure and office needs. (Solihull Council should note this requirement particularly in the light of the recent criticisms of emerging DPD’s in Lichfield and Stafford).

PPS6 also says that local planning authorities should ensure that the scale of opportunities identified are *“directly related to the role and function of the centre and its catchment”*. This means that local planning authorities must be clear about the role and function of their centres (e.g. “sub-regional” or “district”) within the network of centres before they can decide what scale of development is *“directly related”* to that role and function and whether the strategy for centres should be to consolidate or grow.

7.4 The Scope And Status of The “Solihull Town Centre Strategy”

The Solihull Town Centre Strategy is a fundamentally important stage in the development of policy for the network of centres in Solihull, and for Solihull town centre in particular. It comes at a time when:-

- The retail offer in the town has been polarised by Touchwood Court;
- Morley is known to be actively engaged in planning for the redevelopment/refurbishment of Mell Square;
- Bovis Lend Lease is considering the scope for a second phase of development at Touchwood;
- The Regional Centres Study has been completed;
- The RSS Review is underway and will set the policy context for the growth and development of the regional network of centres; and

- Solihull MBC must progress its local development framework under the requirements of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

Solihull MBC’s Local Development Scheme (Revision One) (January 2006 - March 2009) currently refers to the preparation of only one Development Plan Document – the Core Strategy.

The Core Strategy will be an appropriate “home” for a range of spatial planning policies relating to the network of centres and the relationship of Solihull with centres in adjoining local authority areas (and suggestions are made on the scope of those policies later in this section). However, pre-production work is scheduled to commence only now with pre-submission consultation programmed for Summer 2007 although the key headline dates for the Core Strategy are subject to review. That ties in with the programme for the RSS Review, and submission in 2008. This means that there will be no vehicle for expressing strategic spatial policies relating to the Borough’s centres for some time to come.

In relation to the “home” for site specific policies and proposals, there is no suggestion in the Local Development Scheme (LDS) that the Borough Council is considering the preparation of either a “Centres DPD”, which could cover town centre strategy for the network of centres, or a “Solihull Town Centre Area Action Plan” (AAP), either of which could test and develop the conclusions of this strategy.

The process that has been followed in the preparation of this document, as agreed in the Consolidated Study Brief, falls short of the procedures that are required for the production of Development Plan Documents (DPDs). For example:-

- The outcome of the RSS Review in relation to the centres strategy will be uncertain for some time yet and whilst the “shape” of that strategy may be inferred from the conclusions of the Regional Centres Study, those conclusions have not yet been developed into policy directions by the Regional Planning Body.
- The evidence base is lacking in key areas including the preparation of a comparison/convenience goods retail and leisure need assessment (building from the Regional Centres Study) for Solihull, the need to

supplement the vitality and viability assessments and the possibility of building a town centre transport model.

- Stakeholder consultation has been limited, has not been on “options”, and there has been no wider community engagement.
- There has been no rigorous development of options for accommodating growth in a combination of Solihull and other centres in the network.
- The development opportunities described in preceding sections have not been subjected to sustainability assessment.

Given these issues, this report cannot be simply converted into a draft DPD.

Some of these “failings” against procedure in PPS12 might not prevent this study from being progressed as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). However, the document has not been subjected to the *“...rigorous procedures of community involvement”* that PPS12 advises should apply.

More fundamentally, there is currently no statutory spatial planning document on which an SPD could be based, and there will not be until the Core Strategy has been adopted. Moreover, PPS12 is clear that SPDs should not be used to allocate land for development.

Consequently, we conclude that this document cannot easily be converted into either a DPD or SPD but that it may perform five very important functions.

- It may provide an important element of the evidence base for the preparation in due course of local development documents and has generated a debate on the Strategic Vision and Objectives for the town centre:
- It has provided the means to test the suggestion in the Regional Centres Study that the growth of Solihull town centre may nevertheless be constrained by physical and other matters:
- Linked with the above, it provides a basis for testing, through representation, the conclusions of the Regional Centres Study and the spatial policy directions that will emerge in the RSS Review;

Part 7 – Delivery of the Strategy – The Planning Policy Framework

- It may function as an advocacy document and help to set the agenda for the consideration of public sector estate strategies in the town centre; and
- The Council may wish to consider the potential to adopt the Study, in a modified form and following community consultation, as a non-statutory “Town Centre Strategy” of the type that PPS6 advises (at para 2.18) “*can play an important and complementary role in ensuring the vitality and viability of centres*” and which may “*be part of the evidence base for development plan documents including AAPs*”.

7.5 The Timing Of The Review Of The Regional Spatial Strategy

At the time of writing, the West Midlands Regional Assembly web-site sets out the “*agreed adjustment*” to the RSS Phase 2 timetable which programmes publication for consultation of Options in January 2007, and Submission in December 2007.

Publication of the Local Planning Authority’s Preferred Options Core Strategy is programmed, in its LDS Revision One, for June 2007 and with Submission programmed for March 2008. This means that adoption of the RSS may be 2-3 years away.

Thus, key stages of the Core Strategy are following 4-5 months after key stages in the RSS Phase 2 Review. The advice in PPS12 is that the Core Strategy should normally be the first development plan document to be produced. This means that any Centres DPD, or Solihull Town Centre Action Area Plan, will logically follow on perhaps 6-12 months after the Core Strategy.

7.6 Recommendations

Given the lengthy RSS timetable, there could be a temptation to press on with the preparation of statutory spatial planning policy for the Borough’s centres. At this stage, we consider that would be neither necessary nor desirable for a number of reasons.

Before reviewing those reasons, we have considered below how the Local Planning Authority might choose to place various centre related policies within its Local Development Framework (LDF).

Table 7.1: Development Plan Documents

Core Strategy DPD	Centres DPD	Development Control DPD
The hierarchy of centres	Town Centre and Primary Shopping Area boundaries	Criteria based policies for unallocated sites
Strategic positioning (sub-regional or other)	Site allocations (boundaries and scale/mix of uses)	Generic town centre design policies
The spatial strategy for Solihull (based on retail/housing led growth) and other centres (based on consolidation around private sector-led proposals)	Phasing of allocations (if any)	Parking standards
Quantum of growth - convenience /comparison retail and phasing (if any)	Centre/site specific design guidance	Landscape policies
Quantum of growth - other main town centre uses (leisure, offices and housing)	Centre/site specific transport policies	Protection/frontage policies
Relationship with centres beyond Solihull’s boundaries	Planning contributions from allocations	Control of A2 - A5 uses
Transport strategy for centre – key targets	Protection/frontage policies	
Balance between in and out of centre B1(a) office development		

The above table assumes that the local planning authority will prepare a “Centres” DPD covering Solihull, Shirley, Chelmsley Wood and Knowle centres.

The alternative would be to prepare a “Solihull Town Centre AAP” which would contain the same scope of policies as set out for the Centres DPD in the table above, but only for Solihull. Matters such as the town centre and primary shopping area boundaries of the other three town centres could be picked up in the Development Control policies DPD.

The advantage of a Centres DPD is that it would more easily allow options for distribution of growth between the centres to be generated and considered. Having said that, it may be possible to test options for distribution of growth in main town centre uses through the Core Strategy.

The advantage of a Solihull Town Centre AAP is that it would be a very appropriate vehicle for Solihull town centre if the decision is taken by the Council that the town centre is an “*area where significant change ... is needed*” (para 2.17 of PPS12) and where it is necessary to identify the distribution of uses, inter-relationships, site allocations and the timetable for implementation.

A “sub-option” in either scenario could be to produce a broad Centres DPD or Town Centre AAP and leave more detailed guidance on the development of individual sites to be covered by one or more masterplan-based Supplementary Planning Documents.

Whichever route is chosen, we noted above that the Local Planning Authority need not proceed quickly to the preparation of statutory policy for Solihull town centre. Our reasons for saying that are as follows.

- The advice in PPS12 is that the Core Strategy should normally be the first DPD to be prepared and the preparation of other DPDs should follow a logical order, cascading from the strategic framework of the Core Strategy to the detailed policies and proposals of Allocations and/or Action Area Plan DPDs.
- There is a need for the Borough Council’s Core Strategy to be informed by a borough-wide need assessment which should draw from the Regional Centres Study and enable the local planning authority to test the centres policy directions in the RSS Phase 2 Review Preferred Options documents (and we recommend that the Council commissions this work quickly to allow time for effective consideration of, and comments on, the RSS Phase 2 Review Preferred Options).
- There is a need for other elements of the evidence base to be prepared to minimise the risk of the Core Strategy failing the ‘Coherence, Consistency and Effectiveness’ soundness tests and to support either a Centres or Solihull town centre local development document.
- There is a need for the strategic positioning of Solihull town centre, and the quantum and distribution of retail and other main town centre uses, to be determined in the RSS as those key issues will inform the Core Strategy and other local development documents.

Part 7 – Delivery of the Strategy – The Planning Policy Framework

- This study has been prepared having regard to key sustainable development objectives set out in national planning policy (and in particular PPS6). This will give it credibility as a non-statutory “Town Centre Strategy” if the Council chooses to use the study in that fashion.
- Our view is that it is not necessary for the Mell Square proposals to be phased and that they should be supported as a matter of principle in the context of national planning policy and the framework provided by the existing RSS and adopted Solihull UDP Review.
- The development opportunities that we have named as Phases 3 and 4 are dependant on a review of the estate strategies of a number of public sector bodies, including the Council.

The following section, Part 8, is the final part of this strategy. It details the key elements of this strategy’s Implementation Plan.

**Part 8:
Delivering of the
Strategy –
Implementation
Plan**

Part 8 – Delivering the Strategy – Implementation Plan

8.1 Introduction

This final part of this report identifies how the strategy will be delivered. Information is provided on the Implementation Plan and the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.

8.2 Implementation Plan

Introduction

The development programme outlined in this Town Centre Strategy is a large scale, complex and long term undertaking which will require robust management and co-ordination arrangements. The framework is based upon a combination of land use, urban design and transportation actions that will take place in parallel and, as such, will mutually support each other to achieve maximum regeneration impacts.

This Implementation Plan will play an integral role in the delivery of the 2021 vision set out in this Town Centre Strategy. It identifies key projects that underpin the strategy, when they need to take place and which body is responsible for action.

The content of this implementation plan is a function of timescale – further work is needed to gain a fuller understanding of infrastructure requirements (and costs) to deliver the proposals up to 2021. This Implementation Plan provides a broad framework within which more detailed delivery plans can be prepared at the local level to sit alongside the emerging LDDs.

Key Conditions of Effective Implementation

The Implementation Plan for the Town Centre Strategy can not be static. It needs to have an element of flexibility to respond to changing market dynamics and public sector priorities and resources. However, to achieve the levels of development identified in this town centre strategy there are certain conditions that need to be in place to ensure effective and timely delivery. These include:-

- **Political commitment** – This needs to be as strong as possible to ensure that momentum and commitment is not lost. There will be some challenging decisions necessary, particularly in relation to the

implementation of key redevelopment projects e.g. the future of the civic buildings in Solihull.

- **Consensus building** – There is a need to build consensus through public engagement around the proposed town centre strategy centred upon the long term benefits that will flow from its implementation for all parts of the town.
- **Sustained levels of public sector investment and intervention** – To deliver the level of growth proposed there would need to be significant public expenditure to make this strategy deliverable.
- **Increased private sector contributions** – Private sector investment is central to the implementation of the Town Centre Strategy proposals and will be supported by complementary public funding of key developments and infrastructure. Section 106 and Section 278 contributions as part of the planning obligations of development will also apply (these are detailed in Part 6 – Phasing). In the future this will be potentially influenced by the Government's proposals for a new Planning Gain Supplement (PGS). The general principle should be that developers should be responsible for mitigating all of the impacts of their development proposals. It is accepted, however, that in certain circumstances it may be necessary for the public sector to initially 'pump prime' infrastructure funding with this paid back in accordance with an agreed formula once the private sector developer(s) starts to achieve returns from development.
- **Behavioural changes** – A key dimension of delivery of the preferred growth strategy will be the need to secure behavioural change in a number of policy areas. These changes will be critical if the sustainable development principles highlighted in this strategy (Part 4) are to be adhered to and the more effective use of resources fully integrated into lifestyle choices in the town. Key areas for action include travel behaviour, namely restructuring the travel system to encourage use of non-car modes; reducing consumption and use of water; reducing production of waste and reducing consumption and use of energy. Sustainability principles adopted in this Strategy draw on best practice

and seek to encourage change in behaviour in order to address these challenges.

Funding and Delivery

Key funding sources to deliver the anticipate growth could include:

- A sustained level of private sector investment, which, of course, will be influenced by the market and other factors.
- A sustained level of public sector investment through Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council capital programmes, other local authority programmes, Higher and Further Education funding, Highways Agency funding, and other sources.
- The use of Section 106 and Section 278 contributions.
- A contribution from the introduction of a Planning Gain Supplement (assuming that the Government proceeds with this concept and this will of course depend on the form PGS takes).
- Other potential sources could include:
 - Local Transport Plan – in relation to the relocation of the station for example; and
 - Transport Innovation Fund – this is designed to support delivery of transport measures, especially demand management.

Key to achieving growth will be the need to identify funds to facilitate the provision of all of the necessary development related infrastructure in a timely manner.

Delivery Vehicles and Mechanisms

Local Development Vehicle

Significant change in our towns and cities and the need to deliver growth has led to a focus upon developing appropriate models to deliver new development and investment. It is important that local authorities when faced with the task of managing complex change decide if a local delivery vehicle

Part 8 – Delivering the Strategy – Implementation Plan

(LDV) is appropriate for them and to then choose a model which is fit for purpose.

LDVs which integrate the functions of relevant agencies at a local level through formal and informal partnerships (often supported by Government funding) can provide direction, commitment and coherence to the delivery of large scale investment. LDVs can, for example, be given specific responsibilities to drive forward sustainable development in a town centre. They can use land assembly, investment and planning powers (their own or using the powers of other agencies) to create confidence and stimulate private investment to enable Government and local community objectives to be realised. In the consultant's view, local authorities should be key members of LDVs to ensure that local accountability and delivery wouldn't suffer.

Recent experience has underlined the importance of:-

- Ensuring access to adequate and committed funding both operational and capital prior to establishment of the LDV.
- Recognising that private investment will not just 'happen' – public funds and/or contribution of assets will often be needed as a catalyst to stimulate private sector involvement.
- Ensuring adequate resources – to project manage and co-ordinate complex development projects. The availability of appropriate skills will be key.
- Recognising that the LDV must adopt an entrepreneurial approach that is innovative, not risk averse and drives the delivery of projects within defined timescales though in a manner consistent with community needs and aspirations. This requires strong leadership and would build upon the track record and success the Council has enjoyed previously in the town centre and elsewhere.

Formal LDV Models

The range of LDV models is growing and the selected approach must be tailored to suit the specific local circumstances. They range from statutory bodies such as Urban Development Corporations (UDCs), Urban

Regeneration Companies (URCs) and Urban Development Areas (UDAs), through to informal local partnerships. The former models (e.g. UDCs, URCs and UDAs) are not appropriate to the Solihull context given a range of factors including the scale of development, political position and the lack of Government funding. However, there are other models based, in particular, around legal partnerships that could be adapted to the Solihull situation. Two such approaches are outlined below.

Limited Liability Partnership (LLP)

In this type of model, the LLP is a body corporate, which means the members are united and consolidated together to be one person/entity in the law, thereby providing limited liability for its members. The Limited Liability Partnerships Act 2000 governs LLPs. The main feature of a LLP is that it combines the organisational flexibility and tax status of a partnership with limited liability for its members. An LLP can do anything, which an individual or partnership or a company can lawfully do.

There are various examples of LDVs which have been constituted in the form of an LLP. They usually have an Executive Board supported by a number of paid officers. The organisations involved in setting up the LDV would eventually share all profits from the Trust on agreed terms. They may also be delivery co-ordination teams whose role would be to deliver particular proposals.

A LLP has to strike a balance between local democratic accountability and formal delivery powers, with a strategic approach. It has certain tax advantages and also has the ability to bring together various separate bodies and their powers. However, there are also possible disadvantages given that certain legal aspects of the constitution have been untested in the courts, the basic profit motif behind having an LLP is potentially conflicting with local authority's primary focus and in some cases the exit strategy from the LLP may be complicated.

Unlimited Non-Statutory Partnership

The general rules of equity and common law are applicable to partnerships and the absence of a formal partnership agreement, the provisions of the Partnership Act 1890 will apply. LDVs based on this model have no legal status or any powers beyond those of the individual partners. They can be

established by a relevant local authority working with the RDA, private sector and other key partners to deliver a co-ordinated approach to the problems and opportunities in the targeted area. The local authority retains the lead role and will also be the accountable body.

It is interesting to note that in some towns, the adoption of partnership models has emanated from the concept of 'town centre management'. In the early years, town centre management initiatives were mainly established as partnerships between the local authority and a few key retailers. However many of these partnerships have developed into wider structures. The development partnerships and in some cases their formalisation into companies limited by guarantee (see above) reflects the increasingly diverse range of activities that town and city centre management has become involved in and the record of success. The most successful of these initiatives has generally involved senior representations from key private sector interests, the local authority and other public sector stakeholders who have been able to develop or support the development of a widely adopted vision and strategy for the centre and share a common approach towards delivery mechanisms.

Funding is always a key issue. The partners involved largely fund the town centre management vehicle. Core funding typically comes from members of the Board or Steering Group, or from a wider membership scheme with the local authority and the private sector each contributing on a 3 or 5 year basis.

In towns such as Solihull the introduction of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) has added to the potential funding mix. Once a majority of businesses within an area vote in favour of a BID, all businesses are committed to contribute through the life of the BID to a maximum of 5 years. This allows the town centre partnership to deliver its action plan more quickly and with more certainty (other aspects of town centre management are addressed in the section below).

Private Sector Models

A different type of approach and one that doesn't formally involve the local authority has recently emerged. A good example is the 'Birmingham Alliance' – a partnership between Hammerson, Henderson Global Investors and Land Securities – formed to redevelop a large part of Birmingham city centre

Part 8 – Delivering the Strategy – Implementation Plan

including the Bull Ring. By setting up this partnership the members have overcome issues of competition and have facilitated a constructive and phased approach to provide high quality city centre development.

This type of model (perhaps facilitated by the local authority) may be appropriate to Solihull town centre given the potential for 2 large redevelopment schemes at Mell Square and land adjoining Touchwood which, depending on timing, could potentially be in competition.

Local Authority Joint Ventures

The foregoing approaches have essentially concentrated on large scale town centre wide LDVs aimed at achieving pre-determined social, environmental and economic objectives. Solihull Council as a key landowner in the town centre will recognise the potential contribution that its assets could make towards delivery of a high quality mixed use development on, for example, land between the High Street and Homer Road. The Council will clearly play a critical role in future development of the town centre as both local planning authority and as a prominent landowner. This means that the Council will have particular influence over the nature and scale of new development in the future and will need to promote an appropriate development mechanism to ensure that its political, community and financial aspirations are satisfied. There are a range of joint venture structures that have been adopted for town centre development schemes which usually involve the local authority investing its estate in exchange for an equity share in the development and/or other property opportunities. These transactions can be complex and clearly Solihull Council will wish to take appropriate professional legal and property advice before taking such a venture forward.

Conclusions

Solihull town centre will be a focus for considerable growth upto and beyond 2021. This growth will require coherent guidance from a strategy which includes a deliverable vision, robust strategic objectives and a sound delivery plan. The present town centre management arrangements would not appear adequate to co-ordinate this significant level of change – a new structure will be required. This must involve the local authority given its large landholding interest and critically should be properly resourced.

The delivery model adopted must reflect local circumstances, in particular, it must ensure proper co-ordination of phased redevelopment linked to key improvements to town centre infrastructure. This could involve the setting up a formal LDV structure or more likely (bearing in mind the potential high private sector development interest) should be based on a less formal partnership model involving key public and private sector stakeholders. In this model, Solihull Council would retain the lead role and planning powers and working with private sector partners would be the driving force behind the delivery of schemes within the town centre. This approach would remove the need for a complex legal partnership but nevertheless would enable a co-ordinated approach to opportunities and development implementation within the town centre. To provide the appropriate level of focus, the Council may wish to consider the creation of a separate 'delivery body' set up specifically to implement town centre development which will be distinctive from the local authority but nevertheless would use its powers and resources as appropriate.

The issue of delivery of town centre development in the context of this study will require further consideration once the Council has a clearer view on future plans for its estate in the context of the emerging town centre Area Action Plan.

Town Centre Management

The redevelopment of Mell Square, as part of the town centre proposals, offers the potential to act as a catalyst for enhancing the overall retail attraction of Solihull town centre. However, in order to maximise the benefits to the rest of the centre, it will be essential to co-ordinate the delivery and long term management of the centre as part of an overall strategy for the town centre as a whole. During the construction stage, the Council and Morley Fund Management will need to assess carefully the phasing of the development and the strategy to ensure maintenance of adequate car parking, signage and continuity of trade for existing retailers affected by the redevelopment scheme. While the proposals are likely to come forward on a phased basis, it will also be necessary to consider the programme to ensure the development is delivered in the shortest possible timescale.

Equally, following the opening of the new Mell Square redevelopment, it will be necessary to ensure that the management regime for this development

fits within the Council's overall strategy for the effective management and promotion of Solihull town centre.

The contribution which the Mell Square scheme can make to the operation of the rest of the centre both through any planning obligation and potentially as part of a possible town centre bid initiative, will also need to be given consideration. In addition to providing a high quality retail environment capable of retaining and attracting new multiple retailers to the centre, the development provides a catalyst for substantially enhanced management and marketing initiatives. The Council will need to consider what opportunities exist to ensure that all parts of the centre are effectively managed and promoted in order to maximise the benefits of the scheme for the centre as a whole.

In order that Solihull town centre maintains its current shopping role it is essential that the centre focuses on improving its mainstream offer. This Town Centre Strategy reflects this approach. Equally it will be important to build upon current assets the town centre possesses in terms of specialist shops etc. Clearly, a strategy to attract visitors through a specialist retail offer and the particular ambience of Solihull would usefully complement its core retail function.

It is recognised that this is more difficult to deliver in commercial terms. Commercial viability is a perennial issue for specialist uses, particularly when competing with national chains. In situations where the Council is the landowner (or development partner) consideration should be given in the drawing up of development agreements to mechanisms that could support the establishment of independent traders (eating/drinking uses and specialist shopping) especially in the early years. Such mechanisms could be introduced through the imposition of planning obligations.

Land Acquisition and Compulsory Purchase

In implementing projects identified in this Town Centre Strategy, it may be necessary for public sector statutory powers in planning and compulsory acquisition to be used to secure comprehensive regeneration. The Borough Council fully intends to ensure the holistic planning and redevelopment of the town centre. It should not hesitate to intervene where demonstrable benefits can be shown to the economic, social and environmental well-being of the

Part 8 – Delivering the Strategy – Implementation Plan

area and the proposals accord with the objectives and policies of the Unitary Development Plan, the emerging LDDs and this Town Centre Strategy.

Site Specific

The mechanisms adopted for delivery of projects will vary according to the nature of the sites, the issues involved and their ownership:

- **Private Sector Owned Sites** – In these cases, the Council should expect the private sector developer/investor to take the lead in bringing forward development proposals. The emerging proposals should be discussed at an early date with the Local Planning Authority. Prior to the submission of a planning application, the proposals will be expected to comply with the requirements of the Unitary Development Plan, the LDDs and this Town Centre Strategy. In exceptional circumstances, the Metropolitan Borough Council (or one of its public sector partners) should be willing to, in the wider community interest, facilitate development through acquisition of land by compulsory purchase, if this would maximise regeneration benefits and the proper planning of the area. In the majority of development schemes, it is anticipated that Section 106 Agreements will be necessary in order to secure a contribution towards regeneration within the town centre, including environmental and transportation improvements.
- **Council Owned Sites** – Where the Council is the principal landowner, they should take a lead role, working with other private and public sector partners to deliver a development scheme. This is likely to involve the Council (and its partners) selecting a lead development partner via a competitive selection process based upon responses to a carefully defined brief. In general terms, the successful developer will be required to enter into a development agreement with the Council which will oblige the company to deliver a development scheme according to agreed criteria.

On Council owned sites the provision of necessary infrastructure and other contributions required will be secured via development agreements (based upon detailed development briefs) with the Council's selected development partners. Exceptionally, the Council may seek outline planning permission

on key development sites to establish the principle of development; reduce planning risk and to provide a clear statutory basis for acquisition of land.

The Future Planning Process

The key implementation objectives which developers will be required to address through town planning proposals are to:

- Secure by way of binding agreements and planning conditions, as appropriate, the development of the sites, including the provision of appropriate infrastructure in accordance with the adopted Unitary Development Plan, the emerging LDDs and this Town Centre Strategy;
- Where land assembly, including compulsory purchase, is necessary, these proposals should be discussed with the Borough Council at an early stage; and
- Adopt appropriate mechanisms for achieving and maintaining a high quality, distinctive development with a full range of appropriate infrastructure and related facilities within acceptable time limits.

Planning Applications

Outline planning applications will need to be submitted to the Council. The following information will be required to be submitted with outline planning applications:

- Development concept plan/masterplan;
- Land-use budget;
- Landscape masterplan and strategy;
- Transportation assessment (including a Travel Plan);
- Environmental Statement (if the development would result in significant environmental effects);
- An archaeological desk study (if an Environmental Statement is not required);
- A habitat survey (where required, and not already covered in an Environmental Statement);
- A Flooding Assessment and Surface Water Management Plan;
- Energy statement;

- An Environmental Monitoring Scheme to control nuisance (noise, dust etc) during construction;
- A draft legal agreement; and
- Design and access statement.

Following approval, detailed or reserved matter applications should be submitted for individual development areas and infrastructure with the necessary environmental supporting information and design and access statements.

As part of determining the applications, developers would agree through a Section 106 agreement the necessary contributions. This process is, however, based on current circumstances and is likely to change given the proposals already announced by the Government in relation to developer funding of infrastructure.

Planning Obligations and Conditions

In general terms, the following matters will need to be dealt with by condition or, if necessary, by a planning obligation. The scale of contribution will relate to the specific impacts of development:

- The timing and phasing of the development;
- The delivery of strategic infrastructure, including the transfer of land, where necessary, to the Highway Authority and contractual commitments to achieve completion;
- Structural landscaping and contributions thereto;
- The provision and timing of any elements of community/cultural provision;
- The provision of on and off-site transport improvements;
- The provision of bus facilities and contributions to bus services and other transportation improvements;
- Travel plans for significant traffic generating uses;
- The provision of open space and play facilities, where appropriate;
- Contributions to public art;
- Affordable housing provision;
- The provision of fire hydrants; and

Part 8 – Delivering the Strategy – Implementation Plan

- Ongoing management and maintenance of community facilities, including commuted sums as necessary for open space and amenity provision, roads, footpaths and cycleways.

Please note this is not an exhaustive list, other items may also be required.

In considering planning applications on all of the sites identified within this Town Centre Strategy, the Council will ensure that developers provide appropriate contributions towards the cost of providing transport and other necessary infrastructure. The level of contribution should be in proportion to the scale of the development and the additional demands that it will place upon the existing infrastructure.

Risk Management

The Council and its partners acknowledge that the Town Centre Strategy comprises a series of ambitious and potentially high risk projects, requiring high levels of commitment from both the public and private sectors. This section highlights the principal areas of risk and provides a view on how they might be mitigated.

Table 8.1: Risk Management

Nature of Risk	Proposed Risk Mitigation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining commitment and support from partners/local communities 	The Metropolitan Borough Council is committed to the delivery of this town centre strategy as part of its emerging LDDs and has full political support for taking it forward. Support from other public and private sector partners will help to crystallise this support. Appropriate public engagement processes will be put in place to ensure that local communities are kept informed and consensus built up on the emerging proposals.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring commercial viability of projects 	The Council and its partners have no control over the macro-economic climate. The Council will, however, working closely with organisations such as AWM and English Partnerships to seek to promote the town as a place to do business and will use its powers in an appropriate manner to facilitate the economic viability of key schemes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining development interest 	This again depends to some extent upon the economic climate. Developer interest in Solihull is currently high and so this should not be a particular issue for Solihull.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of financial resources and capacity within the public sector to deliver the town centre strategy proposals 	Financial resources are a perennial issue within the public sector, but with strong private sector support likely this should not be a key issue for the Council as long as they can gain political consensus behind the proposals.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delays in planning in securing planning permission 	It is intended that the Council will aim to minimise planning delays through the introduction of specific measures to ensure efficient determination of town centre planning proposals.

Nature of Risk	Proposed Risk Mitigation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site constraints 	These constraints should be discussed at a very early stage within the development process.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure constraints 	There are no known over-riding capacity constraints in relation to utilities, which could prevent development taking place. The main issue will arise from the provision of new transportation infrastructure. It is envisaged that this will be provided through a combination of public sector funds and contributions from private sector development schemes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assembly of sites 	In exceptional circumstances the Metropolitan Borough Council (and its public sector partners) will be willing to utilise compulsory purchase powers to acquire land where there is clear evidence that this would facilitate comprehensive redevelopment in the wider public interest. These circumstances will be rare, but nevertheless the Council recognises that where the acquisition of third party land is proving difficult, then there may be no alternative to this course of action.

8.3 Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

Introduction

Advice on the review and monitoring of implementation of the proposed Town Centre Strategy is a requirement of the consolidated project brief.

This section focuses upon the broad approach to be adopted, rather than upon the creation of a specific framework itself. The comments draw heavily upon the most recent Government guidance and best practice.

Background

Review and monitoring are central to the success of the Government's 'Plan, Monitor, Manage' approach to the planning system. They help local planning authorities to measure the delivery of the spatial vision and objectives of the local development framework and should be carried out on a continuous and pro-active basis. Given that this Town Centre Strategy, although non-statutory, aims to provide a framework within which the local planning authority can produce their local development documents (LDDs), it is appropriate therefore to consider in general terms the role of review and monitoring of the Strategy in this report.

Government policy attaches significant weight to identifying outputs and trends from monitoring techniques thus developing an evidence base that will allow the planning authorities to measure the success of LDD policies and implementation mechanisms.

Annual Monitoring Report

In order to present the results of the process, local planning authorities are required to produce an annual monitoring report which should assess actual plan progress compared with targets and milestones (further advice on this aspect is provided in the Local Development Framework Monitoring: A Good Practice Guide, ODPM, 2005).

It is important that local planning authorities and regional planning bodies co-ordinate monitoring activities to ensure that regional, sub-regional and local monitoring frameworks operate together thus avoiding duplication and to reduce the burden on data collection. In this case the Solihull LDD will take the lead from the monitoring framework in the West Midlands RSS, which, in itself, will be assessed through information provided by the local authorities on local core output indicators.

Similarly – and a key point in this context – it is important that local planning authorities seek to integrate their approach to monitoring and survey with other local initiatives including their community strategies. Their annual monitoring reports should reflect how LDD policies fit with wider community and local objectives.

Identification of targets common to these policies and the emerging LDDs and integrated monitoring of these aspects will help ensure effective data collection and a comprehensive approach to monitoring of common targets and indicators.

It follows that it will also be a priority for the plan making authority to also integrate their current approaches to review and monitoring in line with Government guidance. This will require a joint approach and in practice will involve an evolution of their approach to monitoring from that used in their current local plans. This is for several reasons. Firstly, the LDD that will be informed by this Town Centre Strategy will provide a more comprehensive and specific set of policies and objectives drawing upon those identified in the West Midlands RSS. Secondly, PPS12 emphasises the need for a stronger focus upon implementation in LDDs and this means that links between monitoring and delivery will have to be strengthened. Thirdly, there is now a statutory requirement to integrate Sustainability Appraisal monitoring into the monitoring system for LDDs.

Part 8 – Delivering the Strategy – Implementation Plan

Policies, Objectives and Targets

Best practice indicates that the Local Planning Authority in taking this Town Centre Strategy forward into their development plan should take an objective-led approach to the selection of targets and indicators for use in their monitoring frameworks. This will enable a direct link to be made between the key targets and indicators and the performance and/or delivery of their plans.

Indicators

The Town Centre Strategy has identified a set of strategic policy objectives, which the plan-making authority can use as their starting point for the identification, and definition of their own objectives and related indicators for monitoring the performance of the LDD. Whilst current local plans identify a suite of targets/indicators these generally fall short of the requirements set out in the most recent Government guidance. Final selection must depend on the availability of existing data sets and any new data that may be needed to comply with Government advice.

The nature and spread of the potential indicators chosen will be a matter for the local planning authority having regard to the advice contained in the Government's LDF Monitoring Guide. They will also need to be consistent with the West Midlands RSS monitoring framework and should take into account the strategic growth policies and spatial principles set out in this document.

8.4 Summary of Report Recommendations

Planning

- Maintain and protect the potential role of Solihull Town Centre through the RSS Revision process;
- Prepare Solihull LDD Core Strategy to provide a policy framework for investment and continuing improvement for the town centre;
- Prepare and adopt an Action Area Plan (AAP) which will provide a medium to long term route map and policy context for development of the town centre;
- Prepare a town centre design code;

- Produce key site development briefs (SPDs);
- Consider the extent to which planning obligations (S.106) could contribute towards town centre improvements.

Transport

- Develop a new town centre transport 'model';
- Undertake feasibility study of a new public transport interchange at Monkspath;
- Prepare a town centre car parking strategy;
- Work with Centro/bus operators to expand the network of high quality Bus Showcase/Red Routes serving the town centre;
- Consider potential funding options.

Delivery

- Review the estate implications of SMBC's service delivery strategies;
- SMBC to continue dialogue with Police and Magistrates Courts on their estate strategies and related programmes;
- Maintain regular engagement with interested developers/landowners in the town centre to achieve a co-ordinated approach to major scheme development;
- Carry out a detailed feasibility study of the Touchwood (Phases 3A and 3B) developments to consider the potential to deliver future Council accommodation requirements as part of the proposals and likely implications (in terms of procurement, funding and timing) of this approach;
- Review the options for more effective co-ordination and delivery of town centre development. It is recommended that this focuses upon the setting up a formal 'Stakeholder Group' involving a partnership of SMBC and key landowners/operators. The Council may also wish to encourage the potentially competing developers to consider a 'Birmingham Alliance'

model to facilitate collaboration and enhance effective development phasing.

- Consider land assembly implications, in particular the need for compulsory purchase, if required;
- Assess phasing of public transport and highway improvements to ensure no delay will occur in development coming forward; and
- Explore phasing and construction management considerations to minimise development impacts and disruption to operation of the town centre.


Appendix 1:
Direction Papers
(Bound Separately)

Appendix 1 – Direction Papers

The 6 Direction Papers:

- Development/ property market;
- Retail policy;
- Town centre healthcheck;
- Public sector assets;
- Transport; and
- Urban design;

are bound and provided separately



Appendix 2:
Planning
Policy Context

Appendix 2 – Planning Policy Context

National Policy

- **PPS1 General Policy and Principles (2005)** – PPS1 sets out the Government's vision for planning and the promotion of sustainable development. It emphasises the need for local planning to integrate the aims of sustainable development; economic development; social inclusion; environmental protection and the prudent use of natural resources. PPS 1 promotes 'positive planning' to achieve sustainable development. It encourages the preparation of plans that set out clear visions for their communities and emphasise the need for a transparent planning system.

To deliver these objectives, PPS1 requires that regional spatial strategies and local development plan documents should form the basis for making decisions on planning applications. Decisions must be taken in accordance with the development plan unless other material considerations indicate otherwise.

- **PPG3 Housing (2000)** - PPG3 promotes the concept of mixed communities. It stresses the need for higher residential densities (especially in areas well served by public transport), reduced parking standards and prioritises the use of previously developed land in urban areas. An update to this guidance issued in January 2005 advises that the release of land reserved for employment or commercial uses, which might be better used for housing, should be considered favourably. PPS3 draft consultation requires plans to meet the housing requirements of the whole community; seeks greater choice and mix in housing; promotes sustainable development and good design.
- **PPS6 Planning for Town Centres (2005)** - PPS6 sets the Government's policies for the development of town centres and the main town centre uses. The Government's key objective for town centres is to promote their vitality and viability by adopting a proactive approach towards planning for their growth and development. Through regional spatial strategies and local development documents, regional planning bodies and local planning authorities are asked to deliver the Government's objectives for town centres by:

- Developing a hierarchy and network of centres;
- Assessing the need for additional town centre uses at both a regional and local level;
- Identifying the capacity of each centre to accommodate growth, as set out in the relevant development plan document and making provision for its accommodation;
- Providing a comprehensive plan for an area of renewal or development;
- Addressing the location and layout of new development;
- Developing an urban design strategy, which establishes a comprehensive urban design vision and is supported by specific urban design policies, guidelines or proposals for specific sites;
- Addressing the spatial implications of strategies for parking, traffic management and improvement of the pedestrian environment; and
- Setting out a detailed implementation programme for bringing forward development on key sites, including, where appropriate, proposals for addressing particular issues such as land assembly through compulsory purchase orders.

PPS 6 highlights the key role that the preparation of Area Action Plans (AAPs) has to play in addressing local, site specific issues in areas where significant change or conservation is needed and where specific site allocations need to be made. To complement relevant local development documents, PPS6 also advises that Local Authorities should consider the preparation of non-statutory Town Centre Strategies to assist in delivering the effective management and promotion of town centres. In developing a town centre, it will be important to:

- Draw up a profile of the centre which identifies its essential qualities and seeks to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of the

community it serves by consolidating and building on existing strengths;

- Assess the role of the centre and the need and scope for change, and renewal and diversification;
- Draw up a shared vision, a strategy and action plan for the centre which can inform and be informed by any relevant development plan document; and
- Develop a centre management strategy or initiative, which may include proposals to address issues such as managing the evening and late-night economy, tackling crime and transport issues.

The principle purpose of this study is to provide the Council with comprehensive advice on how it should respond to the Government's policy requirements set out in PPS6. Guidance on how each of these issues should be addressed is explained in more detail in the appropriate later sections of this Study.

- **PPS11: Regional Spatial Strategies (2004)** – PPS11 sets out the Government's procedural policy on the preparation of Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs). Under section 38 (3) of the planning and compulsory purchase Act 2004 ("the 2004 Act"), the RSS is part of the statutory development plan. Section 39 of the 2004 Act sets an objective for the RSS to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. In order to deliver this objective, PPS11 requires that the RSS should provide a broad development strategy and vision for the region covering a fifteen to twenty year period. As part of this process the RSS will need to consider the role that the region's network of town and city centres can play in meeting the Government's sustainable development objectives.

Further guidance on the role of the RSS in providing a strategic framework for managing the development of the regional network of centres and the policy requirements placed on Regional Planning Bodies (RPBs) in planning for their future development is set out in PPS6: Planning for Town Centres.

Appendix 2 – Planning Policy Context

- **PPS12: Local Development Frameworks (2004)** – PPS12 sets out the Government's policy for the preparation and monitoring of Local Development Frameworks (LDFs). A Local Development Framework is a non-statutory term to describe a portfolio of Development Plan Documents (DPDs) that will include policies, proposals and other documents to guide development at the local level, within the overarching context of the RSS. These will include:
 - **The Core Strategy** – this will set out the spatial vision, spatial objectives, policies and a monitoring and implementation framework for the local authority area;
 - **Site Specific Allocations** – this will show the allocation of land for specific uses;
 - **Area Action Plans** - this may include proposals for conservation areas or areas which may be the subject of major change, including town centres; and
 - **Development Control Policies** – which will be included in any of the above documents.

Further guidance on the respective roles of the different types of development plan documents in planning for the future development of town and city centres at the local level, is set out in PPS6: Planning for Town Centres.

- **PPG13: Transport (2001)** – The key objectives of PPG13 are to integrate planning and transport at the national, regional and local level to promote sustainable transport choices in order to reduce the need to travel, especially by car. To deliver these objectives, when preparing development plans and considering planning applications, local planning authorities should actively manage the pattern of urban growth to make the fullest use of public transport, focus major generators of travel demand in city, town and district centres and near to major public transport interchanges.
- **PPG15: Planning and the Historic Environment (1994)** – PPG15 underlines the importance of safeguarding historic buildings and enhancing where appropriate conservation areas by preventing

inappropriate development. The importance of identifying viable uses for listed buildings is highlighted.

Regional Policy

- **West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy** - Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands (RPG11) was published on the 16th June 2004. RPG11 became the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) on commencement of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and it forms part of the development plan for Solihull for the purposes of Section 38 (6) of the 2004 Act.

The Regional Spatial Strategy can be summarised as enabling all parts of the Region to meet their own needs, in a mutually supportive and sustainable way. The RSS sets out a series of comprehensive policy approaches that will be pursued across different parts of the region. These include promoting within the Major Urban Areas of Birmingham/Solihull, the Black Country, Coventry and North Staffordshire a balanced network of vital and vibrant town and city centres as the strategic focus for major retail, leisure and office developments.

Policy UR1 recognises the key roles that the rejuvenation of the regions urban centres has to play in securing the urban renaissance of the West Midlands Region. This policy theme is further developed through Policies UR2 and UR3 that establish a series of policy objectives to guide the regeneration and development of the Regions wider network of centres as drivers of economic growth. This strategic approach is further refined in Policy PA11 which identifies a network of 25 strategic town and city centres across the region, including Solihull, which should remain the focus for major retail, leisure and office developments. Importantly, the network of town and city centres in PA11 seen as a network of complementary centres rather than one of centres competing with each other.

In approving the WMRSS (RPG11) in June 2004, the Secretary of State identified a number of policy issues that needed to be addressed in a future review/revisions to the RSS. This included the need for the West Midlands Regional Planning Body to undertake further work to inform an early review of the RSS to identify those centres where major new retail, leisure and office development should be focussed in order to achieve a balanced

network of centres. This work is currently on-going and forms part of Phase 2 RSS Revision work programme. In January 2005, the West Midlands regional Assembly appointed Roger Tym & Partners to undertake the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy - Regional Centres Study to inform the development of policy. The consultants Final Report was published in March 2006 and its implications for the development of the regions wider network of centres including Solihull Town centre is considered in Part 7 of this report.

Local Policy

- Solihull Unitary Development Plan (2006): The Solihull Unitary Development Plan 2006 which covers the period 2001 – 2011 was adopted by the Council in February 2006 and is a full replacement for the 1997 Solihull UDP. Chapter 8: Retailing and Town Centres sets out policies and proposals for shopping and town centres.

Policy S1 of the UDP offers support for new development and other proposals that will help to maintain the vitality and viability of the Boroughs existing shopping centres provided that the scale and type of development is appropriate having regard to the size and function of the centre.

Policy S2 (Proposal S2/1) defines the primary shopping frontages within Solihull Town Centre (the extent of which is described later in this report).

Policy S3 sets out the overarching strategy for the development of Solihull Town Centre. The policy affirms the Council's support for proposals that will maintain or strengthen the function of the town in offering a wide choice of shops, employment, leisure and other trip generating facilities and services within an attractive environment. Such proposals could include mixed-use developments. The Council, when considering proposals for development which affect the character or appearance of Solihull Conservation Area, will have regard to the policies relating to Conservation Areas contained within the Environment section of this plan.

The remaining policies in Chapter 8: Retailing and Centres (S4 – S10) provide a policy framework to guide the development of the Boroughs remaining town, district and local shopping centres, and the consideration of proposals for development in edge and out-of-town locations.

Appendix 2 – Planning Policy Context

A number of other plan policies aim to focus development within the Boroughs Town Centres. These include Policy E3 (Proposal E3/1), which states that proposals for general office development will be encouraged in the town centres of Solihull, Shirley and Chelmsley Wood on a scale appropriate to their role and function.

The Solihull UDP has recently been adopted. The policies of the Plan support development that will help maintain and enhance the vitality and viability of existing shopping centres. PPS6 requires (para1.6) that RPBs and local planning authorities should plan positively for their town centres growth and development. This issue is further addressed in Part 4 of this Study.

Appendix 3:
Sustainability
Appraisals and Core
Sustainability Aims

Appendix 3 – Sustainability Appraisals and Core Sustainability Aims

This Appendix provides a proposed methodology based on Government planning policy, SA guidance and our experience of the important role that SEA and SA plays in similar development strategies.

Strategic Environmental Assessments

The EU Directive 2001/42/EC on assessment of effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (the ‘SEA Directive’) came into force in the UK on 20 July 2004 through the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. The Directive applies to a variety of plans and programmes including those for town and country planning and land use and sets out a) the framework for future development consent, b) is likely to have a significant effect on the environment.

The overarching objective of the SEA Directive is:

“To provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans... with a view to promoting sustainable development, by ensuring that, in accordance with this Directive, an environmental assessment is carried out of certain plans... which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.” (Article 1)

SEA is an iterative assessment process which plans and programmes are now required to undergo as they are being developed to ensure that potential significant environmental effects arising from the plan/programme are identified, assessed, mitigated and communicated to plan-makers. SEA also requires the monitoring of significant effects once the plan/programme is implemented.

Sustainability Appraisal

Under the new regulations (Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004, 28 September 2004), implementing the provisions of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004; a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is required for the new statutory Local Development Documents (LDDs). As these LDDs will require SAs it makes sense, both in terms of procedural practicality as well as methodological

completeness and robustness, for the statutorily required SEA to be extended to encompass the more wide-ranging requirements of the new statutory SA.

The purpose of SA is to promote sustainable development through better integration of sustainability considerations in the preparation and adoption of plans. The regulations stipulate that SA of LDDs should meet the requirements of the SEA Directive.

Planning Policy Statement 1 (PPS1) describes Sustainability Appraisal in Paragraph 9 of Annex B:

“A Sustainability Appraisal is intended to assess the impact of plan policies from an environmental, economic and social perspective. It is intended to test the performance of a plan against the objectives of sustainable development and thereby provide the basis for its improvement. Guidance on carrying out the Sustainability Appraisal will show how they can comply with the requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive”.

SA thus helps planning authorities to fulfil the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in preparing their plans.

The UK Government’s Sustainable Development Strategy ‘Securing the Future’, published in March 2005, outlines a set of shared UK principles which will be used to achieve the goal of sustainable development. The guiding principles have been agreed by the UK Government, Scottish Executive, Welsh Assembly Government and the Northern Ireland Administration. They bring together and build on the various previously existing UK principles to set out an overarching approach. The five guiding principles will form the basis for policy in the UK. For a policy to be sustainable, it must respect all five of these principles in order to integrate and deliver simultaneously sustainable development:

- **Living within environmental limits** – respecting the limits of the planet’s environment, resources and biodiversity to improve our environment and ensure that the natural resources needed for life are unimpaired and remain so for future generations;

- **Ensuring a Strong, Healthy and Just Society** – meeting the diverse needs of all people in existing and future communities, promoting personal wellbeing, social cohesion and inclusion, and creating equal opportunity for all;
- **Achieving a Sustainable Economy** – Building a strong, stable and sustainable economy which provides prosperity and opportunities for all, and in which environmental and social costs fall on those who impose them (polluter pays); and efficient resource use incentivised;
- **Promoting Good Governance** – Actively promoting effective, participative systems of governance in all levels of society – engaging people’s creativity, energy and diversity; and
- **Using Sound Science Responsibly** – Ensuring policy is developed and implemented on the basis of strong scientific evidence, whilst taking into account scientific uncertainty (through the precautionary principle) as well as public attitudes and values.

The SA need not be prepared in any more detail than is useful for its purpose. It should focus on the significant sustainability effects of the DPD and consider alternatives that take into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the document.

Article 5 of the SEA directive lists some factors to be considered in deciding what information to include in the Environmental Report, which are equally valid for a SA:

- Information that may reasonably be required, taking into account current knowledge and methods of assessment;
- The contents and level of detail of the plan;
- The objectives and geographical scope of the plan;
- The stage reached in the decision making process; and
- The extent to which it would be more appropriate to assess certain matters elsewhere in the decision making process.

PPS12 states that:

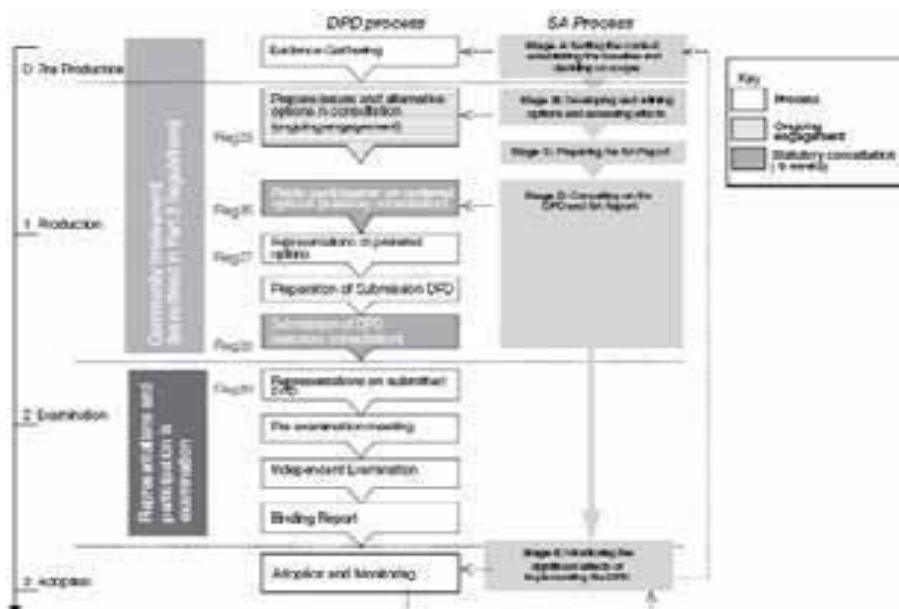
Appendix 3 – Sustainability Appraisals and Core Sustainability Aims

“The SA will play an important part in demonstrating if a Local Development Document is sound by ensuring that it reflects sustainability objectives. The results of the sustainability appraisal will contribute to the reasoned justification of policies.”

The DPD preparation process, as set out in PPS12, can be divided into four main stages. These are:

- **Stage 1: Pre-production** – survey and evidence gathering;
- **Stage 2: Production** – preparation of preferred options, supported by continuous community involvement followed by a six week period of formal public participation on those options and then preparation and submission of the DPD in the light of the representation received;
- **Stage 3: Examination** – an independent examination into the soundness of the plan; and
- **Stage 4: Adoption** – the binding report and adoption (followed by implementation and monitoring).

This process is illustrated in the figure below, including the relationship with the key SA stages.



Further detailed information on the preparation of SA for Development Plan Documents can be found in PPS1, PPS12 and the Sustainability Appraisal Guidance Note (Nov 2005).

The requirements to carry out SA and SEA are thus distinct, but recent guidance (Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Documents, ODPM, November 2005) from the former Office for the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) states that it is possible to satisfy both through a single appraisal process and provides a methodology for doing so.

According to the same guidance, the main stages in the SA process are as follows:

- **Stage A** – Setting the context and objectives, establishing the baseline and deciding on scope;
- **Stage B** – Developing and refining options and assessing effects;
- **Stage C** – Preparing the Sustainability Appraisal Report;
- **Stage D** – Consultation on the plan and the Sustainability Appraisal Report;
- **Stage E** – Monitoring the significant effects of implementing the plan.

The ODPM's guidance emphasises that SA is an iterative process which identifies and reports on the likely significant effects of the plan and the extent to which its implementation will achieve the social, environmental and economic objectives by which sustainable development can be defined. The intention is that SA is fully integrated into the plan making process from the earliest stages, both informing and being informed by it. The guidance also sets out a requirement for the preparation of the following reports:

- **Scoping Report** (documenting Stage A work) which should be used for consultation on the scope of the SA; and
- **Sustainability Appraisal Report** (documenting Stages A and B work) which should be used in the public consultation on the Preferred Options version of the draft plan. The SA Report fully encompasses the

requirement to produce an Environmental Report under the SEA Directive.

It also identifies the following stages identify how Sustainability Appraisals are incorporated within the DPD Process.

Appendix 3 – Sustainability Appraisals and Core Sustainability Aims

DPD Stage 1: Pre-production – Evidence Gathering

SA stages and tasks

Stage A: Setting the context and objectives, establishing the baseline and deciding on the scope

- A1: Identifying other relevant policies, plans and programmes, and sustainability objectives.
- A2: Collecting baseline information.
- A3: Identifying sustainability issues and problems.
- A4: Developing the SA framework.
- A5: Consulting on the scope of the SA.

DPD Stage 2: Production

SA stages and tasks

Stage B: Developing and refining options and assessing effects

- B1: Testing the DPD objectives against the SA framework.
- B2: Developing the DPD options.
- B3: Predicting the effects the DPD.
- B4: Evaluating the effects of the DPD.
- B5: Considering ways of mitigating adverse effects and maximising beneficial effects.
- B6: Proposing measures to monitor the significant effects of implementing the DPDs.

Stage C: Preparing the Sustainability Appraisal Report

- C1: Preparing the SA Report.

Stage D: Consulting on the preferred options of the DPD and SA Report

- D1: Public participation on the preferred options of the DPD and the SA Report.
- D2(i): Appraising significant changes.

DPD Stage 3: Examination

SA stages and tasks

- D2(ii): Appraising significant changes resulting from representations.

DPD Stage 4: Adoption and monitoring

SA stages and tasks

- D3: Making decisions and providing information.

Stage E: Monitoring the significant effects of implementing the DPD

- E1: Finalising aims and methods for monitoring.
- E2: Responding to adverse effects.

The SEA Directive's Requirements

Preparation of an environmental report in which the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme, and reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and geographical scope of the plan or programme, are identified, described

and evaluated. The information to be given is (Art. 5 and Annex 1):

- a An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan or programme, and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes;
- b The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme;
- c The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected;
- d Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC;
- e The environmental protection objectives, established at international, Community or national level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation;
- f The likely significant effects on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors. (Footnote: These effects should include secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long-term permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects);
- g The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme;
- h An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information;
- i A description of measures envisaged concerning monitoring in accordance with Article 10;
- j A non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings.

The report shall include the information that may reasonably be required taking into account current knowledge and methods of assessment, the contents and level of detail in the plan or programme, its stage in the decision-making process and the extent to which certain matters are more appropriately assessed at different levels in that process to avoid duplication of the assessment (Art 5.2)

Consultation:

- Authorities with environmental responsibility, when deciding on the scope and level of detail of the information to be included in the environmental report (Art.5.4)
- Authorities with environmental responsibility and the public shall be given an early and effective opportunity within appropriate time frames to express their opinion on the draft plan or programme and the accompanying environmental report before the adoption of the plan or programme (Art. 6.1, 6.2).
- Other EU Member States, where the implementation of the plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on the environment of that country (Art 7).

Taking the environment report and the results of the consultations into account in decision-making (Art.8)

Provision of information on the decision:

When the plan or programme is adopted, the public and any countries consulted under Art.7 shall be informed and the following made available to those so informed:

- the plan or programme as adopted;
- a statement summarising how environmental considerations have been integrated into the plan or programme and how the environmental report pursuant to Article 5, the opinions expressed pursuant to Article 6 and the results of consultations entered into pursuant to Article 7 have been taken into account in accordance with Article 8, and the reasons for choosing the plan or programme as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with; and
- the measures decided concerning monitoring (Art.9 and 10)

Monitoring of the significant environmental effects of the plan's or programme's implementation (Art.10)

Quality assurance: environmental reports should be of a sufficient standard to meet the requirements of the SEA Directive (Art.12)

Core Sustainability Aims

The following tables provide the detailed principles by which sustainable development in Solihull can be achieved.

Table 1: Moving to a Low Carbon Economy

Moving to a Low Carbon Economy	
<i>Halting and reversing climate change by reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions has become the key global sustainable development priority, threatening massive and rapid alterations to natural systems and processes worldwide over the next few decades. There are at least 30 gases that are known to contribute to the 'greenhouse' effect that produces global warming. By far the most significant of these, by virtue of the sheer volumes of gas emitted, is carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide is emitted in varying quantities as a result of most human activities. Global rates of emission now greatly exceed the capacity of natural systems (atmospheric, marine and biological) to absorb and recycle.</i>	
Core Sustainability Principles	
Transport Reducing the burning of fossil fuels in motorised transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private motorised transport should be reduced • Public transport should be increased • Walking and cycling should be increased
Energy Efficiency Reducing the overall demand for energy by increasing the efficiency of its generation, distribution and use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficiency of energy use in homes, offices and industrial buildings should be increased • Efficiency of energy distribution should be increased with energy generated closest to where it is needed
Renewable energy Increasing the generation of energy from renewable sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generation of all forms of renewable energy should be increased, at scales from individual homes and buildings, to large single or multi-occupancy sites, to entire neighbourhoods

Appendix 3 – Sustainability Appraisals and Core Sustainability Aims

Table 2: Increasing Resource Efficiency

Increasing Resource Efficiency	
<p>'Resources' are the material and energy inputs required for economic production. Material resources are either renewable (reproduced by natural processes) or non-renewable (minerals). 'Wastes' are outputs not used in production and products that are no longer used. Waste is a human concept: in natural processes there is no waste, only inert end products. Fundamental laws of physics dictate that matter can neither be created nor destroyed. The mass of inputs to a natural or human process balances the mass of outputs as products and wastes, plus any change in stocks. Using non-renewable resources at rates faster than they are either recycled or substituted with other resources leads to resource scarcity. Using non-renewable resources at rates faster than they can reproduce causes resource scarcity and can also lead to unrecoverable failure of natural systems.</p> <p>The increasing scale and variety of human production processes means that the ability of natural systems to absorb and recycle waste, their 'carrying capacity', over a given area and time period is frequently exceeded. Human health can be affected, biological processes disrupted and natural systems fail.</p> <p>The closer a human system is to 'living within its means', i.e. using resources at rates at which they can be replenished or substituted, and keeping wastes to levels which can be naturally assimilated and recycled, the more likely it is to be sustainable. Increasing resource efficiency, by doing more with less and directly reusing or recycling wastes, are the obvious ways to bring this about.</p>	
Core Sustainability Principles	
<p>Resources</p> <p>Efficiency of resource use means reducing the amount of natural resource input required per unit of human systems output, and the length of time outputs remains in use.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher densities of housing, commercial and industrial development should be used to increase the efficiency of use of land, water, materials (both in construction and use) and energy Development design and layout should maximise flexibility of use and reuse Previously developed land should be used for new development before considering greenfield land Form, orientation and layout of development should be designed to minimise run-off and maximise use of natural drainage systems to collect and reuse water
<p>Wastes</p> <p>Wastes released to the environment can be reduced by a) directly reusing processed goods and materials as inputs; b) recycling outputs, i.e. reducing processed goods and materials to a less processed state, for use as inputs; and c) recovering energy from unused outputs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic activities should be co-located to optimise opportunities for reuse and development of input-output linkages Incentives should be introduced which reduce the 'throw away' culture, e.g. local tax on waste by weight Waste which is not re-used should be recycled Indirect recovery of energy from waste via extraction of combustible gas or liquid should be used for waste which is not reused or recycled All waste should be processed as close as possible to its generation, using on-site or neighbourhood waste management facilities

Table 3: Enhancing Environmental Assets

Enhancing Environmental Assets
<p>The concept of environmental assets derives from work in environmental economics which posits that, in addition to traditional manufactured assets (i.e. machinery, infrastructure, etc), there are four other forms of "capital asset" which are required for sustainable development: human capital (i.e. skills and knowledge), social capital (i.e. social institutions, culture and</p>

<p>human freedoms), natural resources (land, water, global atmosphere, minerals) and environmental assets (other living organisms and the ecosystems in which they are organised). As prerequisites for all life on earth, water and fresh air are both resources and assets with a unique status. Many environmental assets, such as woodlands and fish stocks, can also be considered as resources, i.e. renewable resources, as well as environmental assets. In addition to their direct 'use value', environmental assets also provide essential 'life support' functions by sustaining the web of life and natural recycling and reproduction upon which human systems ultimately depend. They can also provide aesthetic value, in terms of enjoyment of views, landscapes and natural surroundings.</p>	
Core Sustainability Principles	
<p>Biodiversity and habitats</p> <p>The more variation there is within ecosystems the more capable they are of adapting to change and surviving. Biodiversity is critically linked to habitats. The survival of wildlife populations depends upon the availability of sufficient areas habitat to allow successful reproduction. If habitats become fragmented or too dispersed, the viability of wildlife populations is threatened.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Biodiversity should be maintained and wherever possible enhanced Wildlife habitats should be protected and habitat severance and fragmentation avoided
<p>Green infrastructure</p> <p>Green infrastructure denotes linked areas of greenspace, which provide a mix of direct use value, life support functions and amenity value (i.e. sport, recreation and leisure), and as well as natural and semi-natural wildlife habitats such as forests and marshes also include man-managed features such as gardens, hedgerows, ditches and village greens.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of high quality green infrastructure should be strategically planned to encompass both new and existing development
<p>Air quality</p> <p>Good air quality is vital to the health of ecosystems as well as human populations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local air quality should be maintained and wherever possible improved
<p>Water quality</p> <p>The quality of all water in the water cycle is vital to the health of ecosystems as well as human populations. Surface water courses also have amenity and aesthetic value.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The quality of surface and ground water should be protected and wherever possible enhanced
<p>Landscapes</p> <p>Landscapes are assemblages of environmental assets that have aesthetic value. As well as 'natural' features (very few of which have not been influenced by humans in some way), landscapes also often contain many man-made features.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development which may result in a deterioration in valued landscapes should be avoided Opportunities should be taken to enhance the value of landscapes with well designed and laid out development which is sensitive to existing landscape features
<p>Built environment</p> <p>Built environment encompasses not only individual buildings and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of all types should be based on high standards of design and construction Innovation and diversity in the form, layout and

<p>their settings but the overall 'urban landscape' created by large groups of buildings together with other man-made features such as gardens, parks, roads and other infrastructure.</p>	<p>construction of development should be encouraged</p>
<p>Heritage assets</p> <p>Heritage assets denotes those features of the built environment which have acquired particular value by virtue of their association with social capital, i.e. their cultural significance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The form and layout of development should respect heritage assets and their settings, seeking to enhance their value wherever possible

Table 4: Enhancing Quality of Life

Enhancing Quality of Life	
<p>Quality of life is defined as the physical, psychological and social well-being of a population, collectively and individually. It relates to both objective factors (i.e. directly measurable, such as health statistics and housing conditions) and subjective factors (i.e. only measurable as perceptions, such as satisfaction with services, perceived crime levels). While in the UK provision of most healthcare and education is still free at the point of delivery, considerable local variation in access still exists. Access to decent housing is of course closely linked to levels of income, and these two together play a large part in determining levels of social deprivation, although access to basic services is also a factor. Provision of cultural, leisure and recreational facilities are important to psychological and social well-being. Social cohesion is closely linked with the level of interaction between individuals in a population, which is often a function of access to services and amenities. Crime levels are most often linked to unemployment and deprivation. However, social cohesion and demographic factors also play a part.</p>	
Core Sustainability Principles	
<p>Health</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High levels of overall physical and psychological health of the city's residents and workers should be maintained and wherever possible improved Disparities in health between areas and social groups should be minimised
<p>Housing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decent housing should be available to all Higher density housing should be used to reduce travel distances to places of work and essential services, increasing the viability of walking, cycling and public transport, and support social cohesion All housing development should aim to foster community sense of place and social cohesion by providing a range of housing types and tenures Affordable housing provision should be matched to identified need All housing should meet decent homes standards as a minimum
<p>Education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High quality educational facilities should be available to all sections of the population All residents should have a choice of high quality pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary education facilities within easy reach by walking, cycling or public transport
<p>Culture, recreation and leisure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All sections of the population should have access to good quality cultural and leisure facilities within easy reach by walking, cycling or public transport Ready access by walking, cycling or public transport to recreational amenities, including high quality green space, should be available to all residents

Appendix 3 – Sustainability Appraisals and Core Sustainability Aims

Table 5: Ensuring Economic Sustainability

Ensuring Economic Sustainability	
<p><i>The most widely accepted definition of economic sustainability is maintenance of economic capital whilst also maintaining productivity, i.e. output of valued product per unit of resource input. At the most basic level economic sustainability is about how companies stay in business. All businesses depend on human capital and natural resources. They generate economic value (creating goods and services for which there is a demand whilst using less economic input than output) by providing employment. And beyond basic human needs, demand is also a function of culture. Higher human capital (skills and knowledge) and more efficient use of natural resources both enable more productive use of economic capital. Economic sustainability is thus dependent upon also maintaining non-economic capital. Much like an ecosystem, whilst individual businesses may thrive or perish, the success of an economy depends on its ability to evolve and adapt. And as with natural systems, diversity and innovation is key to longer term sustainability of economies.</i></p>	
Core Sustainability Principles	
Productivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality education and training should be available to all • Image and business culture should be fostered to attract investment from knowledge industry and other high value businesses • Business culture should be fostered which drives resource efficiency and waste minimisation
Innovation and diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investment in continued education and life long learning should be promoted across all business sectors • Image and business culture should be fostered which attracts investment from a range of sectors and business sizes • Incentives for SMEs should be increased with flexible use units and mixed use development
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phasing of housing development, infrastructure and larger business investment should be closely coordinated